A.N.C.

FALL 20¢

Frontier Stori

TRADE MARK REG.

FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

RED CLOUD THE SIOUX

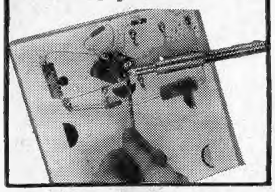
Half warrior, half devil, he scourged the Plains in a holy war against the whites.

A Novel of winding Rio trails—

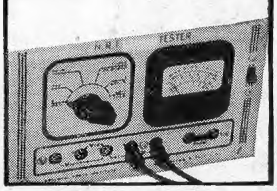
FIGHT, YOU WILD-HORSE GRINGOS!

by **BOB OBETS**

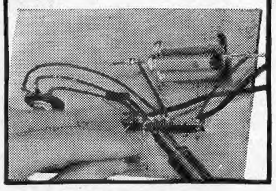
YOU PRACTICE Radio Soldering with Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts I send you. Get practical experience mounting and connecting parts.



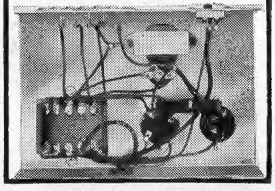
YOU BUILD this Tester with parts N. R. I. sends early in the course. Soon helps you fix neighbors' Radios and EARN EXTRA MONEY in spare time.



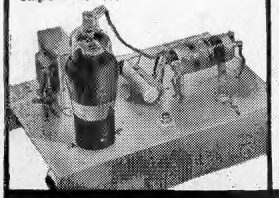
YOU TEST Radio circuits like this built with parts I send. Build special circuits; learn how to locate and repair circuit defects.



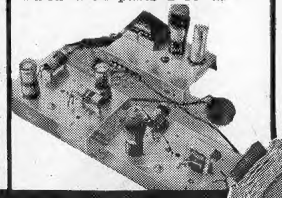
YOU BUILD Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds. Learn how to correct Power Pack troubles.



YOU BUILD this A. M. Signal Generator for more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.

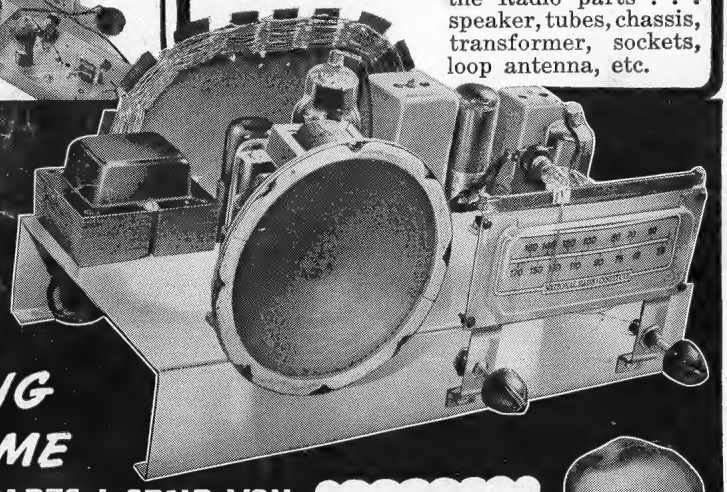


YOU PRACTICE FM (Frequency Modulation) experiments, get more experience with this Superheterodyne Receiver Circuit you build with parts I send.



You Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE With This Superheterodyne Receiver

YOU BUILD THIS complete, powerful Radio Receiver that brings in local and distant stations. N. R. I. gives you ALL the Radio parts . . . speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, sockets, loop antenna, etc.



LEARN RADIO

BY PRACTICING IN SPARE TIME

WITH BIG KITS OF PARTS I SEND YOU

Want a good-pay job in the fast-growing RADIO-TELEVISION Industry? Want a money-making Radio-Television shop of your own? I've trained hundreds of men to be Radio Technicians . . . Men with no previous experience. My tested and proved train-at-home method makes learning easy. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get practical experience with MANY KITS OF PARTS I send. Keep all equipment.

Make EXTRA MONEY in Spare Time

The day you enroll, I start sending SPECIAL BOOKLETS that show you how to make EXTRA MONEY fixing neighbor's Radios in spare time. From here it's a short step to your own shop, or a good-pay Radio-Television servicing job. Or get into Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, or the booming Television Industry.

See What N. R. I. Can Do For You

Act now! Send coupon for DOUBLE FREE OFFER: Actual lesson and 64-page book. "HOW TO BE A SUCCESS IN RADIO AND TELEVISION-ELECTRONICS." Tells how quickly, easily you can get started. Send coupon in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. SMITH, Pres., Dept.9CG, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C.

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME

MY COURSE INCLUDES

TELEVISION ELECTRONICS

I TRAINED THESE MEN

Has Own Radio Service

"I have my own Radio and Television sales and servicing business. I get enough repair jobs to keep me going right along."—ALEXANDER KISH, 34 Pershing Avenue, Carteret, N. J.

Good Spare Time Business

"I have been getting receivers to repair right along, and with NRI methods I don't have to spend much time on them." —S. N. STRICKLAND, 191 Dale Homes, Portsmouth, Va.

VETERANS

You get this training in your own home under G. I. Bill. Mail Coupon.

GET BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9CG
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page book about how to win success in Radio and Television —Electronics. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

☐ Check if Veteran

APPROVED FOR TRAINING UNDER GI BILL

Frontier Stories

Reg. U. S. Pat. Office

T. T. SCOTT, President A. C. ROBINSON, Asst. Mgr. MALCOLM REISS, Editor

A Big Complete Novel of The Border Brigade

FIGHT, YOU WILD-HORSE GRINGOS! . . . . . Bob Obets 4
A gun-totin' Texican and a saber-swingin' shavetail—they rode Rio Grande trails of glory and death for the love of a laughing Sonoran dancer. And both knew Destiny would deal a sidewinder's grim fate to the one who made the first false draw!

Three Thrill-Packed Novelets

THE STAGE TO CHEYENNE . . . . . Emmett McDowell 37
Easy pickins for a hardcase road agent was that slow-movin' stage from Deadwood —loaded with big-strike treasure and a beautiful prairie belle!

THE AMBUSH ARROWS . . . . . W. Edmunds Claussen 66
It was a band of scalp-hungry Crow braves that showed Captain Paul Beihl the redskin treachery that lurked in the heart of a renegade mulewhack. And it was a dew-eyed Conestoga lass that showed him the courage of the long-gun pioneers!

GREENHORN'S GUN . . . . . Joe Chadwick 93
All gold was Fool's Gold in those bloody Black Hills where outlaw greenhorns staked the loop-and-lead claims. . . .

And Three Fast Frontier Short Stories

THE WHITE BUFFALO . . . . . Henry Richardson 51
Only the sacred White Buffalo of the Apache could save Trader Jim Bradford from the burning stake of the great shamen Spotted Horse!

TOMAHAWK TERROR . . . . . A. Kenneth Brent 59
Greater than the danger of attacking Sioux warriors was the duty thrust upon Corporal Sandhurst, the ex-riverboat tinhorn who wanted to desert his post. . . .

GUN WHIP LAW . . . . . Jack Anderson 79
Bullets were ballots for law and order when young Jeff Hacknew tried to enact a new brand of gun-blazing justice for the down-trodden nesters.

Plus An Authentic Fact Article

RED CLOUD THE SIOUX . . . . . T. V. Johnson 85
Half warrior, half devil, he scourged the Plains in a holy war against the whites!

FALL ISSUE,
(July-Sept.)
1949

FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

Volume 17, No. 8
20c per copy

FRONTIER STORIES: Published quarterly by Fiction House, Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter October 2, 1944, at the Postoffice at New York 1, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.
Copyright 1949 by Fiction House, Inc. All rights reserved. This is a magazine of fiction; the characters named and incidents described do not refer to any actual person. While all due care is taken we cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.
Yearly subscription rate 80¢ payable in advance. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.

Coming

to the Screen . . .

KI-GOR

Son of the Jungle

MOST SENSATIONAL!
MOST SPECTACULAR!
MOST EXCITING!
JUNGLE PICTURE
EVER MADE

Don't Miss This Opportunity to Win "*An All Expense Paid*" Trip *to the Jungle* for a Film Test with Ki-Gor, Helene and Bambo, the Elephant.

Send This Coupon ➔ **to enter movie test. Write name and age. Watch your neighborhood theater for further details.**

Please enter me in your KI-GOR screen test.

Name.....

Age.....

Address.....

Send to Suite 2005, Paramount Bldg., 43rd and Broadway, New York City.

"I WAS ASHAMED OF MY FACE

until Viderm helped make my skin clearer in one short week"

(FROM A LETTER BY E. S. JORDAN, DETROIT, MICH.)

If your face is broken-out, if bad skin is making you miserable, here is how to stop worrying about pimples, blackheads and other externally-caused skin troubles.

JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

IT DOESN'T PAY to put up with a broken-out face. Your very success in business, love and social life may depend upon your looks. *Handsomeness and a good appearance usually start with the condition of your skin.* Nobody likes to look at a face that is blemished by blackheads or pimples. WOMEN ARE ATTRACTED TO MEN WHO HAVE SMOOTH, CLEAR, HEALTHY-LOOKING SKIN. Business executives don't choose men whose complexions are against them. Don't take chances with your success in life when this inexpensive Viderm formula may help you.

Good-looking Skin Is Not for Women Only

You—*yes, you*—can have the same handsome complexion, free from externally caused skin troubles, simply by giving your face the special care that screen stars give theirs. There's almost nothing to it—it is just about as easy as washing your face. *The whole secret consists of washing your face in a way that thoroughly purges the pores of every last speck of dirt and grime*—something that ordinary cleansing seldom does. In fact, examination after examination shows that, usually, it is not a case of "bad skin" so much as a case of faulty cleansing. What you should use is a highly concentrated soap like Viderm Skin Cleanser. This penetrates the pores and acts as an antiseptic. Specks of irritating dirt and grime are quickly washed out. They dissolve and disappear, leaving your skin entirely free of the dirt particles that usually bring out pimples, blackheads and other externally-caused skin troubles.

DON'T DO THIS!

Don't murder your skin by squeezing it. Skin is delicate. When you break it, you leave yourself open to miseries. It's far easier, far safer, to let the Double Viderm Treatment help you enjoy a handsome, clearer, blemish-free complexion.

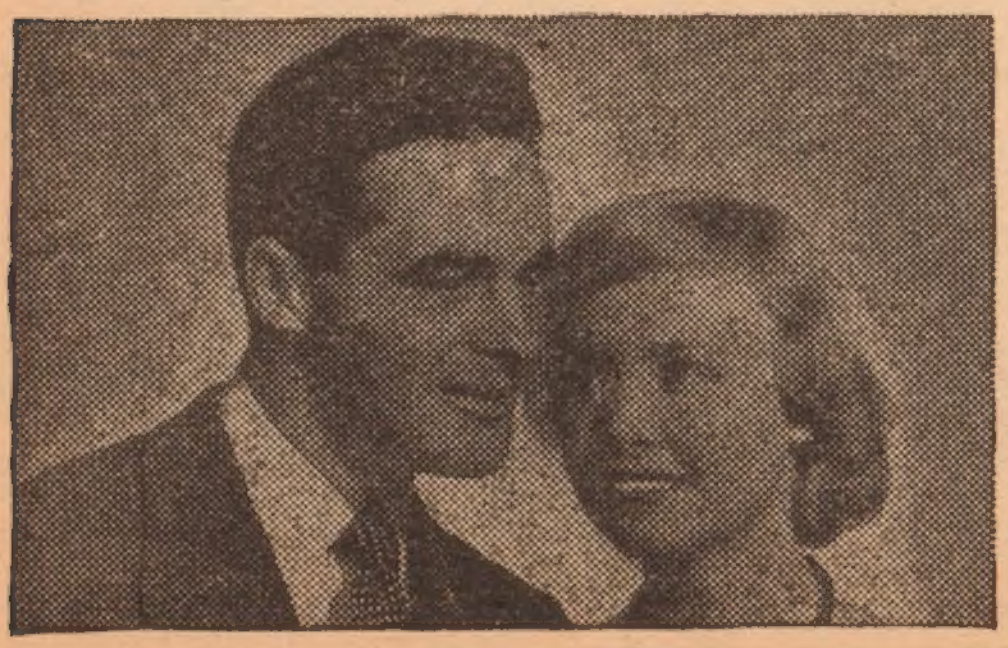
Squeezing pimples or blackheads to get rid of them is a nasty, messy business—but that isn't the worst of it. Doing so may also be injurious and leave your face with unsightly, embarrassing blemishes. There is, now, a much easier, safer, cleaner way to help you rid your face of ugly, offensive, externally-caused skin troubles. *You merely follow a doctor's simple directions.*

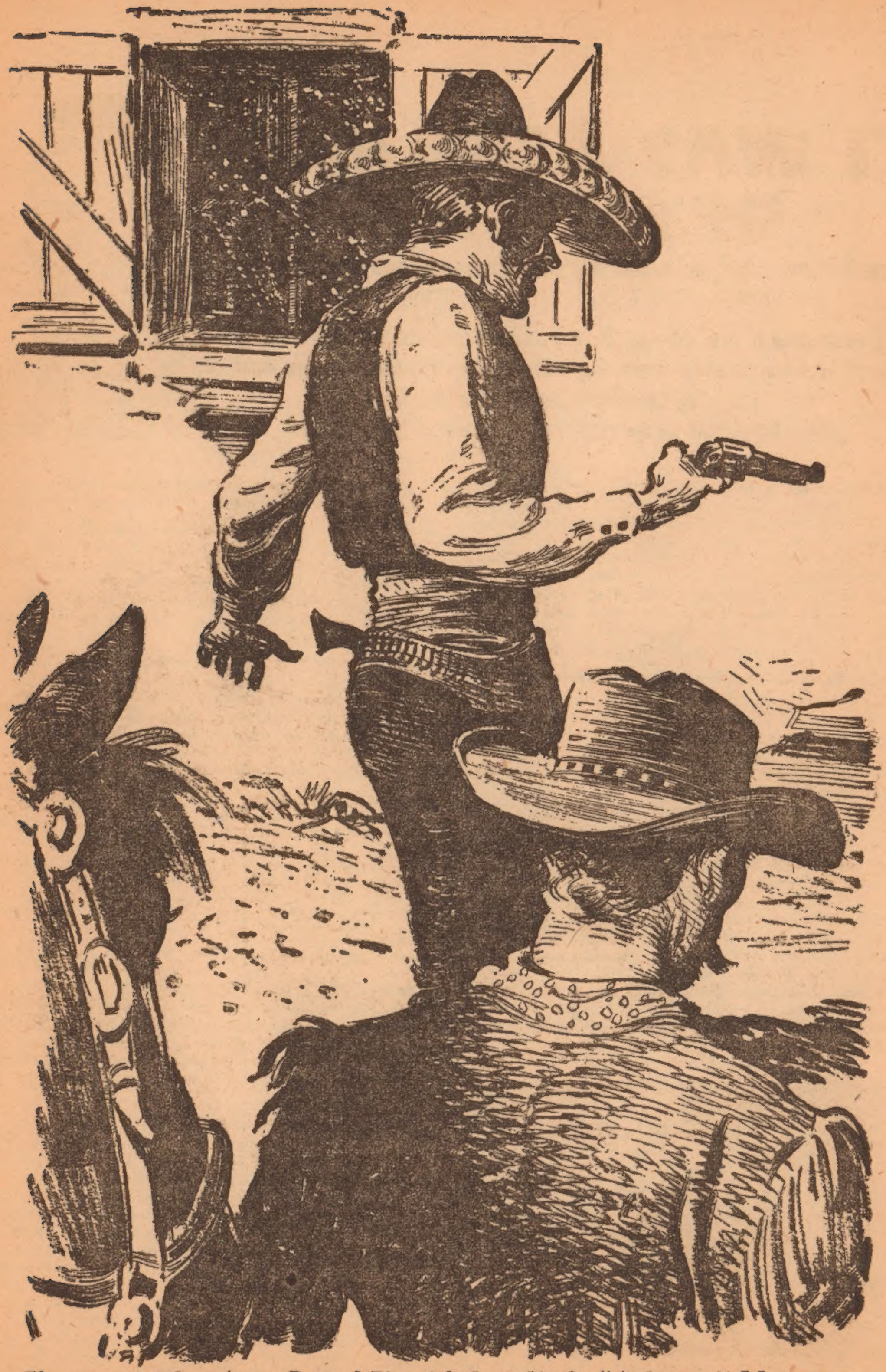
Don't murder your skin! Here's all you have to do to get it smoother and clearer and to keep it that way. Use Viderm Skin Cleanser when you wash your face. Rub the rich lather of this highly-concentrated medicated soap on your face for just a few seconds and then rinse it off. Then apply a little Viderm Medicated Skin Cream and that's all there is to it. Viderm Medicated Skin Cream quickly disappears, leaving your skin nice and smooth. This simple treatment, used after shaving, helps heal tiny nicks and cuts, relieves razor-burn and smarting; besides conditioning your skin.

Give Your Face This Treat for 7 Days

Stop worrying and being embarrassed over what may happen to your skin. Just send for your Viderm Double Treatment this minute, and be confident of a smoother and clearer complexion. Follow the simple directions, written by a doctor, that you will get with your Viderm Double Treatment. Then look in your mirror and listen to your friends admire your smoother, clearer skin—the kind that women go for.

Just mail your name and address to The New York Skin Laboratory, 206 Division Street, Dept. 40, New York City 2, N. Y. By return mail you will receive both of the Viderm formulas, complete with full directions, and mailed in a plain wrapper. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you aren't thrilled with results, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Remember that both of the formulas you use have been fully tested and proven, and are reliable for you. *If they don't help you, your treatments cost you nothing.* After you have received your Viderm, if you have any questions to ask concerning abused skin, just send them in.





The gun pointed at Ames. Pasquel Rico sighed mockingly, "Ai de me, if I have more time . . ." Then Ames knew he was about to die.

Fight, You Wild-Horse Gringos!

By BOB OBETS

AT A DIFFERENT TIME, UNder other circumstances, Lew Carson and Pete Ames might have been friends, for they were both fighting men. Carmalita Santoya, a dusky-eyed girl with hair that held the sheen of a raven's wing, started the trouble between them—but first you should know something about the time, and the circumstances . . .

Those were rough, dangerous days along the Rio Grande, when anything could happen. The Mexican War had ended and most of the Texas men who had marched into Mexico City under Zack Taylor and Winfield Scott had been mustered out. Now most of the cavalrymen on the Rio Grande were from north of Red River, and a real war loomed dark over the land

A gun-totin' Texican and a saber-swinging shavetail—the fate of a nation rested on the outcome of their fight for the love of a Sonoran spitfire.

—a war between the States.

Under Governor Sam Houston, the Texas Rangers had been built up to a formidable force. An aging lion with the cunning of a fox, old Sam used Juan Nepomuceno Cortinas as his excuse for putting so many fighting men on the State's payroll. That rising Mexican chieftain, Sam said, was a menace to Border cattlemen. Later, it came out that Sam was up to his old scheming, that actually he had conceived a daring plan to save the Union from what looked like certain disruption.

But neither the Rangers, Secessionists almost to a man, nor the cavalrymen, who were strong for the Union, knew anything of this. They kept on with their own feud, with Pete Ames and Lew Carson in the middle of it, neither one dreaming that he was to play a part in Sam Houston's bold and dangerous scheme.

Lew Carson rode the Border *senderos* with his troopers, sitting his McClellan saddle straight as the feathered arrow which, three years earlier, had pinned his leg to his horse. That arrow was a greeting from the Kiowas to a young lieutenant fresh from West Point. They took one eager look, those scalp-loving red boys, and named him Hair-Like-the-Sun. For Lew Carson's hair was a brighter yellow than the new stripes down his breeches legs, his eyes a clearer blue than the uniform he wore. And with the smooth slope of his shoulders and his lean long-limbed figure, Lew Carson wore a uniform well. Even on patrol, his black Hessian boots always were gleaming, his black campaign hat free from dust and sitting at a bit of an angle on his silky head. Lew Carson, on occasion, still could flash a boyish smile.

He was from Boston, his voice, his manners, everything about him gentlemanly and correct. You would have expected profane, case-hardened troopers to despise him. Instead, they all but worshiped the man. He was senior lieutenant of K, the Black Horse troop, and in battle it was "Have some tea and crumpets!" as sabers swished or revolvers cracked. For in Lew Carson's veins ran the blood of ancestors who had dumped tea in Boston Harbor, and his men were proud of that fact. They were proud because he was dashing and handsome, and it was not an uncommon sight to see a Troop K man drinking black coffee from a mug with his little finger poked out at an elegant angle. But Lord help the fellow unfortunate enough to make a wise-crack, especially about Lew Carson.

Because some of those K troopers had felt the mud of a buffalo wallow damp against their bellies. They had breathed in the sweet stink of the dead and the dying. With hope-empty eyes they had watched painted devils on painted ponies whirling around them. And in their ears the screeching, the vicious whispering of dogwood switches. Only the cool, steadying voice of Lew Carson to thrust off hysteria.

"O'Hare. About time for tea. Scoop up a bit of that bloody mud and dampen your lips . . . . Collingsworth—head up there, lad. Feed 'em some lead crumpets. You'll live to make a trooper, yet!"

Then the keening notes of a distant bugle, sweetest sound in all the world . . . Then Lew Carson, wounded, stinking, dirty as a hog, sometimes known in Boston drawing rooms but now far from showing it, his thin scorched lips splitting as he grinned at the troopers able to grin back at him.

"Something to tell your girl about, Collingsworth. You'll make a trooper."

"I got to, now, sir."

And to hell with all the pretty manners, the spit and polish, the modulated words! Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson, pride of the Black Horse troop . . .

PETE AMES was another type of man entirely, of a different breed, from a different world. A native Texan, he rode like all Texas men, legs thrust straight down, booted feet in tapaderoed stirrups, his lean rawhide-tough body so at ease in the saddle that he seemed a part of his horse. Many suns and winds had burned the skin of his hands and his hawkish face to the coffee-brown hue of old saddle leather; and in him was the stubbornness and the durability of leather. His gray eyes, deep-set under heavy brows, could grow almost black, and they had a

steady, disconcerting way of staring at a person, as if they stared along the barrel of a rifle . . . But that was the way you usually thought of Pete Ames. You associated him with flaming guns, with bright danger. The acrid tang of horse sweat, of mesquite-wood fires, of black-powder smoke, seemed to cling to him.

Pete Ames' father had soldiered under Sam Houston. As pay for the arm he lost at San Jacinto, Bodie Ames had taken title to a wild stretch of mesquite-covered land, on the Nueces, started his brand and found that he had bitten off quite a chunk. For the Mexicans still claimed the brushy country between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, and between them and the Indians, life for the Ames family was far from dull. Pete Ames killed his first Indian the day he turned fourteen. A year later, when the war with Mexico broke out, he rode into that land with Jack Hays' Rangers. Ben McCulloch was there, Big Foot Wallace and Sam Walker, who helped design a Colt revolver that was named for him. Pete Ames was a smooth-cheeked kid among all those fighting men, when he went down there. He came back a man, with experiences behind him that he never would talk about.

He never even would talk about his homecoming.

In his saddlebags a gay mantilla, for his mother. Silver-mounted spurs for Bodie, with rowels the size of a Mexican *peso*. A jacket bright with conchas and embroidery, a hand-tooled belt with a silver buckle—things that would gladden his kid brother's heart. Pete Ames was thinking about the kid, his own heart pounding as he went splashing across Comanche Creek. He struck spur to his horse, stood up in the stirrups, and he wanted to yell. But more than that, he wanted his homecoming to be a surprise. It was a surprise, for him.

He found the three graves on the black-brush ridge, behind the ranch house. On a weathered pine board at the head of the middle grave, some neighbor, whoever had found them, had scratched out a few words with a bit of red sandstone. Pete Ames could barely make the words out.

KENNY—SALLIE & BODIE AMES
Killed by border bandits
Sept . . .

So it was that Pete Ames rejoined the Rangers. He rode for Rip Ford. He went from corporal, to sergeant, to lieutenant of Captain's Cloud's bold fighting men. And if he acquired a reputation almost sinister, he had good reason for it. If some people thought him cold and unfriendly, they were folks who did not know him well. For Pete Ames, as Ranger Mike McMaloney put it, would wade through hell's brimstone, hock deep, to help a friend, then turn around and wade back if some enemy so much as said "Boo!" at him. Pete Ames never wasted words, seldom smiled, yet from deep within him, at the most unexpected times, a salty humor came bubbling up like water from an alkali spring.

Like the time when he made the report to Captain Cloud that gained him his famous nickname.

"Well, Cap'n"— drawling— "wasn't much to it. Me and McMaloney and the kid, here, stopped by that little *tienda* on the River Road, aimin' at some ca'tridges and Mike a plug of Star. Po' ol' sto'keeper was hangin' to a rafter, th'oat cut, his cash box stripped. Well, we follered some sign from there till it petered out, when I sent Mike and the kid to take a look-see around that old mustanger's *jacal,* whilst I moseyed on to'rds Las Cuevas Crossin'. It was comin' on dark, and—you know how that old song goes. Got sort of lonesome, so I was singin'. 'I wandered today o'er the hee-ills, Mag-gee, where—'"

Here Mike McMaloney growled, "Domn yo' eyes, tell it right. You heard them shots! You knew the kid and me had done run into a ambush and got captured. You knew it was Pasquel Rico's outfit, 'cause all evenin' we'd been a-trailin' 'em. And lastly, condemn yo' buttons, you knew what chance the kid and me had, because just last month you killed Pasquel's brother. So you started bellerin' that McGee-Maggie stuff to let them boogers know somebuddy was a-comin'. Just to stall 'em off from slittin' our th'oats from here to——" And Mike ran a horny forefinger

from one ear around to the other, made a gulping sound as he swallowed.

"Don't you never believe him, Cap'n." Pete Ames shook his head. "Besides lonesome, I figgered that singin' would stompede 'em if anything could. And you know what, Cap'n? I heard a sort of echo, and it was Pasquel Rico a-mockin' me. 'I wander today from the heels, Moggie—' And then he sings out in Mex. 'You sidewindin' so-and-so. Shove yo' dew-claws past them jackrobbit ears. Step down and come right in, Moggie,' he says. So that's what I done."

"Yeah," growled Mike McMaloney, "that's what he done, Cap'n. With both his hands up and that spare gun from his saddlebags stuck under his shirt. When Pete outs with that old grave-filler— But shucks, you'd have to been in the kid and mine's place to appreciated it! Them four chili-ca-peens squandered like quail. Ended up two dead, one winged, and one still a-runnin'. That was Don Pasquel, himself, with the wind through his spiked *bigotes* whistlin' 'La Paloma'. Now, gud save you," glaring at Pete Ames. "Say that ain't the paralyzed truth—Moggie."

The kid of the outfit, Rusty Ware, spoke up huskily. "For once, Cap'n, I can swear Mike ain't stretchin' it none."

And not a word about the rope and the mesquite limb, the dreadful strangling sounds, the hoarse voice pleading, "*Senor,* I swear it! I was not there. I know not the men who raided the Ames *rancho.* Carmalita. Carmalita Santoya, she . . . ."

That wounded Mexican likely would have died, anyway. So why mention the savage bitterness on Pete Ames' face when he rode from the brush? That was Pete Ames' affair, and he knew what he was doing.

Why say anything about it?

Rusty Ware's blue eyes rested briefly on the face of Pete Ames, and a shining glory lit them, as if they beheld the face of a god . . . or of a devil. That was Pete Ames. He made some big and bloody tracks along the Lower Rio Grande, and only his friends could call him Maggie . . .

He was at Carmalita's place, Mike McMaloney and Rusty Ware with him, the night he first met Lew Carson.

THIS PLACE of Carmalita's probably would have escaped the eye of any stranger who chanced to ride the River Road, for it stood off the road a piece, with the Rio Grande convenient to its back door, and even in broad daylight the low adobe building was hidden by gloomy, rank-growing mesquite. When the night shadows deepened, business began to pick up. Then throaty laughter, the clink of gold coins, passionate curses, and the thump of gunshots.

In Carmalita's, blue-clad troopers from Ringgold or Fort Brown rubbed elbows with wary riders of the Border *senderos.* Sight of any Texas Ranger was the signal for a number of hasty exits. If the Ranger happened to be Pete Ames, Carmalita's establishment threatened to blow itself apart.

For that reason, as tonight, Ames usually stayed outside, under good cover, and waited patiently for whatever son of the Bravo the law's long arm was reaching for. Ames had found Carmalita's good hunting, and he had long been interested both in the place and in the dark-eyed and mysterious young woman who ran it.

Where she came from, nobody seemed to know. The Border grapevine whispered that her *patron,* real owner of the place, was a high official in Old Mexico. It had her the wife, the sweetheart, the mistress of Pasquel Rico, the renegade chief. And she was high-born Mexican, she was Indian, she was from an old Spanish family —a dangerous woman who carried a dagger in her garter. Carmalita Santoya, beautiful tigress, kingpin of intrigue on the lower reaches of the Rio Grande.

Ranger Lieutenant Pete Ames took pretty strong stock in the talk about the intrigues and the dagger, didn't doubt some of the rest of it. Carmalita, to his notion, was a woman a man could either hate like sin, or love with every fiber of his being. She could be warm as a mesquite-wood fire on a frosty night. She could be as cold as winter moonlight glinting on gun-steel. She held a strange fascination for Pete Ames, and he wasn't sure he liked the way she made his heart act up. But he was sure of one thing. No matter how much she stirred him, she'd

better not in any way be implicated in the raid on his folks' ranch.

" . . . Carmalita. Carmalita Santoya, she . . ." Those words, spoken six months ago by a dying renegade, came back to Pete Ames and brought the old savage, bitter questions to his mind.

Carmalita and Rico, was there anything between them? Was Rico the man he wanted? He didn't know. He'd had one chance and let Rico get away. But there'd be another time! . . . . And in those six months he had pretended to fall hard for Carmalita. She had seemed to warm up to him a little, too.

Like that night when he trailed her, thinking sure he was onto something. Rode around a clump of brush and found her laughing at him . . . and then, if he wasn't afraid he must watch the Rio Grande with her, by moonlight! Old river sure looked pretty. But the night she kissed him—great Casoose!

Him lyin' doggo in the brush, watchin' her back door, just like now. And there she was in the doorway, her hair gleaming in the lamplight like a new-blued gun-barrel. "Pedro. Pete. Pete Ames." She called so soft a man couldn't believe his ears. Got over there, though, and she told him about some sinful fellers fixin' to waylay a po' Ranger. "Pete—be careful," she begged. Then stood up on her tip-toes and her arms reached, just like——

This time, it was his eyes Ames couldn't believe. Shock laced through him, violent and wicked. For there in the lamplight stood Carmalita. On her tiptoes, her arms reaching. But they were not reaching for Pete Ames.

"You pretty-feathered son! Stand away from my woman!" Ames shouted hoarsely.

He forgot Mike McMaloney and Rusty Ware, patiently watching the front and side doors. He forgot the tip that had brought him here, just on the off chance of bagging the biggest wolf of them all. He headed for the back door, his boot heels slogging the ground with authority.

The young lieutenant, in immaculate blue uniform, white gloves and gleaming boots adding just the proper touch, paid no attention to Ames. His black campaign hat was shoved back on his bright yellow head. His whole attitude was intense and businesslike. He had Carmalita pulled hard against him, and he was kissing her as if he loved it.

Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson: Boston's drawing rooms were far behind him . . . . On the other hand, Pete Ames, sometimes called Maggie, never had set foot in a drawing room.

II

IT WAS AT A *baile* in Rio Grande City, at the home of Judge Good-by Grissom, that Lew Carson first met Carmalita. She wore her burnished black hair swept back, held by a jeweled comb; her green silk gown did wonderful things for her figure. But it was her eyes that got Lew Carson. They were dark and lustrous and they seemed to hold a promise. When she turned them on Lew, a shiver ran along his spine. Twice, he asked her to dance—and that with most of the other girls rolling their eyes at him—but each time she was spoken for. Lew was beginning to think she was playing hard to get, when Judge Grissom came strolling up. Lew never did quite understand it.

Old Good-by, always the politician, merely murmured, "Ah, my dear, I see you two have met." And he gave her smooth-rounded arm a fatherly stroke. "Be nice to Lew. From what I hear, he's going to be the son-in-law of a United States Senator. Got good connections." And he winked at her and went away chuckling.

Her eyes, watching him, held a mocking amusement. "Poo!" she said. And then, with a touch of wistfulness: "What is she like—Lew? But let me describe her. She would live in a big white house, with a flower garden and servants and a piano big as—as two cows. She would have her own *moza,* her maid-servant, to say "Yes, mom," and "No, mom"—with a little curtsey. "Her skin, it is white and soft as the fleece of a lamb, and never in her life will she be hungry or afraid or—"

Here Lew, thinking of brown-eyed, competent, somewhat unruly Miss Margo Pelham, as she really was, broke in with an inelegant, "My Lord!"

But then he had to admit that, compared with Carmalita, Margo might seem a bit on the tame side. He grinned and said, "Let's dance."

Not until later did he wonder how come he had to escort her home. Or how it was that their small talk took such a queer turn. She had an unusually keen and alert mind, he guessed, for she sure was interested in a lot of things . . . . The stand Washington might take in the event of more trouble with Mexico. The influence Sam Houston had with the War Department. And had he heard Senator Pelham express himself regarding that much-misunderstood man, Juan Cortinas? Cheno Cortinas, she assured him earnestly, was the strong man of Mexico. She wondered how he himself felt about Don Juan . . . ?

Lew figured, later, that Judge Good-by Grissom's jug was responsible. He *had* taken a powerful long pull at it. Made his toes tingle and his head spin. Cheno Cortinas, he declared, was his type of man—a natural-born leader, a soldier, a fighting sunnuva-gun if there ever was one. He'd like to meet Cheno, by thunder, he would!

She turned in the saddle and looked at him, then. Her wonderful eyes seemed very sober, shadowed from the moonlight by their incredible lashes.

Lew Carson's head began swimming again. She said, "Somehow, Lew, I believe you would. Your whole career might go to smash. But, Lew this is a bigger thing than you, or me. I believe you are a big man. Lew, if I send for you—will you—?"

They had reached the back door of Carmalita's place. Lew helped her to dismount. Her young, vibrant body was against him. He said, somewhat hoarsely, "Carmalita—for you, I'd do anything."

A barefooted Mexican lad brought Lew the note. "Lew—Please come tonight. It is important . . ."

And here he was, facing a man who looked as sure and deadly as a Border hawk . . . And Lew Carson not quite knowing what it was all about. Wondering if Carmalita was making a fool of him.

For she had taken him to a back room where waited a young Mexican she introduced as Don Carlos Galvan. "Chappo." she said, and set wine and glasses on the table and left them, closing the door behind her. The mystery, the air of intrigue, set Lew's nerves to tingling; he was a kid again, a buccaneer with a black patch over his eye, playing a bold and dangerous game, with a beautiful girl in the offing. And this Don Carlos Galvan—Chappo—was a most interesting fellow!

Nothing of the Border dandy about Chappo Galvan. Although, like any *caballero,* he wore tight breeches, short jacket and big-roweled spurs, these things showed signs of much contact with thorny brush. The big sombrero that swung on its chin strap was unembroidered. The black-handled six shooters that weighted his lean thighs were not things of beauty, nor was Chappo Galvan, himself, overhandsome. Brown face slightly pockmarked. Eyes black as sin. A dangerous man, Lew told himself; perhaps a scoundrel. Yet—there was something likable about him.

He complimented Lew, told him his Black Horse troop was the best on the Border, and they must drink to those brave soldier men. He spoke of the trouble looming between the States. Sadly he shook his head. *Ai de mi,* weak governments were ruining his own native Mexico. They needed a strong man in the *Presidente's* chair—a man, say, like Cheno Cortinas. Or even, perhaps, a man like Don Samuel Houston. And watching Lew intently, he proposed another toast . . . to Cheno and to Don Samuel. They drank and somehow, then, the talk got around to how poor a cavalryman's pay was, how hard and dangerous his job. Whereupon, somewhat stiffly, Lew declared that any trooper worth his salt put patriotism above pay—and he got up to leave. At that moment Carmalita came back into the room. The smile she gave Lew would have melted a chunk of saddle soap.

She was sorry, she said, but a man out front must see Don Carlos on urgent business. Besides, and she took Lew's arm and murmured low in his ear. "I want you to myself for a little while."

Don Carlos made his excuses. Such a pleasure . . . he would see Lew again. His spurs jingled briskly as he went out the door.

Lew never quite knew how the rest of it happened. He found himself beside Carmalita, in an open doorway, looking out into the night. The faint perfume of her, the feel of her so close to him, hit him like a slug of the Colonel's best bourbon. And then she breathed, "Lew—you are so much a man . . . ."

A HELL OF a time to be interrupted! Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson shoved Carmalita away from him. He stared at Maggie Ames, already beginning to hate the fellow with a black unholiness; and Ames stared back at Lew, quiet and ready, with never a muscle moving. Trouble was their business, and both of them were looking for it. Lew Carson smiled.

Through his teeth, Ames said, "You blue-bellied diddler!"

"There's a lady present," said Lew. "But then you must be one of those gallant Rangers I've been hearing about."

"You ain't heard half of it," said Ames, wondering if he'd have to kill the cocksure coyote.

Lew Carson lifted a silky left eyebrow. "Maybe," he suggested politely, "you'd like to tell me the rest of it."

"Show you," Ames grunted.

"Try it," said Lew.

His lip curled in a deliberate, taunting way. His blue eyes, watching the hawkish face of Pete Ames, were as bright and menacing as the saber that swung parallel with the stripe on his breeches leg. But it was the smile that caused Ames to blunder. He took a good look at it and went for his gun, intending merely to lay the barrel across Lew's head. He couldn't know that, at West Point, Lew had been considered more than handy with his fists. He learned about Lew's fists the hard way.

Several things happened about then. Mike McMaloney, from the cover of the brush, came up with his gun in his fist, just as the wiry figure of Chappo Galvan eased out the side door. Far from heeding Mike's bellow for him to surrender, Chappo whirled, quick as any cat, and went back the way he had come, with Mike hard after him.

"By then," as Mike described it later, "you'd of thought somebuddy twisted a tiger by the tail. Gents runnin' and a-cussin', divin' out winders and me askeered to shoot. Wimmen was screechin' and cussin' some, too. That Chappo run right through a door. Left it antigodlin on its hinges, and Carmalita, unbeknowin'st I was right behind him, yellin' at Chappo to run the other way. It's Gawd's truth! And there was po' ol' Moggie, with Lew Carson with his sword waitin' for him to git up, flat of his back a-gazin' up at the flyspecks. Thinkin' they were stars, he was, and sayin', 'Oh, how beautful!'"

That was Mike's version, exaggerated, of course. Actually, Pete Ames hit the floor rolling, and he came up with his gun in his hand. He caught a flashing glimpse of Chappo, dashing through the room. Then Chappo was outside and Ames and Mike McMaloney both were in the doorway, Ames cursing himself as Chappo ran for the near brush.

Ames shouted, "Stop right there, Chappo!" And sent a warning shot over the man's head. When Chappo kept running, Ames leveled down. Ames could put a bullet where he wanted it to go, and he picked out the spacec between Chappo's shoulderblades. He was dropping hammer when Lew Carson shoved a shoulder against him, knocked him to one side and spoiled his aim. He straightened himself, holding bitterly silent, watching the waving brush where Chappo had disappeared.

A horse started up. A mocking voice yelled, "*Adios,* Moggie. See you from some more time." Came a splashing sound, and that was Chappo's saddler—probably a stolen one—hitting the Rio Grande.

Ames turned slowly. "Damn you, Mike. You never popped a—"

Ames saw the gun, then. Its barrel was about as long as his finger. It was poked against Mike's ribs, and Carmalita was doing the poking. She saw the look in Ames' eyes and she took a step backward, still holding the little silver-mounted gun.

"He got away," she said, "and on my knees I will give thanks. Pete Ames, if you had killed him—!"

She was beautiful enough to turn any man's head. There was a fire about her. There was everything. But in this moment

a savage anger was roiling Pete Ames' mind, and the thought that she had made a fool of him—Carmalita and that young jack-legs of a cavalry officer, who had caught him by surprise—did nothing to ease Ames' feelings. He took two slogging strides. His hand clamped her wrist, and squeezed, and the pain brought a little sharp sound past her lips. That as her gun struck the floor.

"He got away, all right," Ames said harshly. "Thanks to you and yo' lord and master, here, that you was huggin' and kissin'. Carmalita, I ought to whip hell out of you, and I've got a mind to do it!"

"I wouldn't. I don't believe I'd lay a hand on her." And there was Lew Carson, not three steps away, his gloved hand resting on the hilt of his saber, his blue eyes glinting, and no hint of a smile on his lips.

Mike McMaloney claimed, later that right then he wasn't a bit worried about young Rusty Ware. Just knew it was bad business for any Ranger to kill a cavalryman, and he'd seen that look in old Pete's eyes before. Opened his mouth, natural-like. Words came out.

"Rusty! Rusty Ware! Come on, Pete, he's in trouble! All this commotion, he'd of been here sure!"

Mike went running, with the rest of them following him. The moon was up and full. They had no trouble locating young Rusty. He was lying in the brush where Ames had posted him, not twenty yards from the front door. The blade of the dagger didn't show much, but the handle was in plain sight, sticking up from the back of Rusty's faded blue shirt.

Rusty Ware would never make the Ranger Pete Ames was. Gone the glory-shine of his eyes, the impish grin. For Rusty Ware the long trail, away from Pete Ames, who had been his god.

For long moments Pete Ames stood, staring down at the lad, perhaps with some of those same thoughts running through his head. Then he turned, slowly and stared at Lew Carson. He spoke slowly, his voice flat-toned.

"I don't know how much you're mixed in this business. I do know you saved Chappo Galvan from the slug I had aimed between his shoulders. And for yo' information, if you don't know it, Chappo Galvan is Juan Cortinas' right bower. Just like his right hand. I was tipped off that Chappo or Pasquel Rico—maybe Cheno Cortinas, himself—was comin' here tonight. Thought it unlikely and only brought two men, but we had all the doors covered. Yet, somehow, Chappo got in. And now one of my men is dead . . . . Now you better do some talking."

For perhaps the first time in his life, Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew couldn't talk. A Texas Ranger lay dead at his feet. Chappo Galvan might have killed him. He, Lew Carson, had talked with Chappo—about things he maybe shouldn't have, in a place where he should not have been. A sense of guilt washed over Lew. It hobbled his tongue.

He almost stammered.

"I—believe me—really! I'm sorry about your Ranger lad. This fellow, Galvan, I know little—"

"My Ranger lad is dead." Ames said savagely. "If I find that you—I'll kill you."

Lew Carson straightened himself. He said, "It's your privilege to try. Any time." He turned on his heel and walked away.

Carmalita caught Ames' arm. Fiercely intense, she cried, "Pete—you don't think—? Chappo never did this!"

"I think one thing," Ames said bitterly. "I saw you lovin' up to that soldier. I know you done yo' dead-level best to help Chappo get away. I think you're a Jezebel, with yo' bread buttered on both sides."

And he turned away, sharply, ignoring the pleading of her eyes, and said to Mike McMaloney, "Git his legs, Mike. I'll take the hands."

III

THEY BURIED Rusty Ware on a low hilltop, beside the Rio Grande. They all took off their hats, and Captain Cloud said, "He was clean and honest and happy in his work. He would have made a good Ranger. I can't say more for any man." He stood a moment, his sharp eyes staring at the blue hills, across yonder in Old Mexico. Then Jim Allers, someone, said,

"We can't help him here. Might as well git on back to camp."

That was all there was to it. A stranger, not knowing the ways of these men, would have thought them callous, to say the least, A stranger, hearing Pete Ames make his report, a few minutes later, would have thought there was no heart in him. And after that report was finished, the men of Captain Cloud's outfit got the surprise of their lives.

Most of them had still been in their blankets when Ames and Mike McMaloney came bringing young Rusty in. Rusty had no kin. In this hot land a funeral couldn't wait overlong. So they got the thing over with, and now Captain Cloud was ready for Ames' report.

He set a match to his pipe, his gray eyes watching Ames over his cupped hands. "How was it?"

"Knifed," Ames said tonelessly. "In the back. Had him watchin' Carmalita's front door, Mike the side, myself the back. We'd been there two, three hours. Looked like it wasn't any use. I went in the back door—might say I was baited to come in. Somehow, Chappo Galvan had got inside. He give me the slip—clean. When we went to look for Rusty, he was dead. That wasn't my fault. Lettin' Chappo get away prob'ly was."

"Ames," Captain Cloud said, "you've been with me quite a time. You haven't made many mistakes, but you've made some—like tonight. Howsoever, that's not the point. I've got reason to believe you're putting personal business above Ranger business. When a man does that in my outfit, he's through. I'm sorry Ames."

It was like a bombshell, as unexpected as if the earth had begun to shake. Pete Ames met the stare of those gray eyes, and not a muscle of his dark face moved.

Jim Allers said violently, "Hell no, Cap'n! Pete's the best damned man in the outfit!"

"You're damned right," Mike McMaloney growled. "Cap'n, by guddelmighty—"

Cloud's glance raked them. "I do the hiring . . . and the firing. I usually have good reason for my actions."

He started to turn, stopped. "Ames, I brought out some mail last night. There's a letter for you."

"Obliged," Ames said, and his eyes were bright and wicked. "Maybe, Cap'n, I can do you a favor sometimes."

And without a further glance, a nod, a word, for these men he had ridden with and fought with, he stepped past them and began readying his bedroll.

He was saddling his horse when Mike McMaloney growled. "Here's yo' letter, Pete."

Ames barely glanced at the envelope. He stuffed it in his hip pocket, said, "Thanks."

"By guddlins, Pete, I never thought I'd see the day when I'd quit ol' Cap'n Cloud, but this time—by Gawd, a lot of the boys feel just like me! You just say the word—"

"No, Mike." Ames shook his head. "Cloud was right. There's a matter or two, personal—but I never thought he'd fire me."

His eyes softened the least bit. "Maybe we'll ride a few more *senderos* together yet, Mike."

"Yeah, but Gawd knows, when," Mike said huskily. "First Rusty, then you. Pete, I ain't had many friends—"

Ames slapped him lightly on the shoulder. "I ain't dead yet, so don't cry in your beer. You'll have me doin' it." And he stepped in saddle and rode away, his hawkish face softer than any Ranger had ever seen it.

Then he saw Captain Cloud watching him. His lips thinned into a straight line; black bitterness seeped into his eyes. Although he would not admit it, the Rangers had meant a lot to him. He had respected and admired Captain Cloud. And, as Mike had said, in this world a man had few friends . . . .

He was riding into Rio Grande City when he remembered the letter stuffed in his hip pocket. Without much interest, he got it out, smoothed the wrinkled paper and began reading it. The letter was brief, a note, really, and Ames read it over a second time.

"Now what," he asked himself aloud, "would *he* be wantin' with a feller like me?" Then: "But he don't know I been fired from the Rangers. Expect that'll

change things. Still, right now I've got no place else in particular to go. Hoss, git yo' head up. We're takin' a *pasear* to San Tone."

THREE NIGHTS later, Ames stepped out of one of the cafes that bordered San Antonio's plaza. Before him the open fires of coffee and tamalie vendors glowed brightly in the dusk. Past him moved cowboys, cattlemen, *caballeros* with flat-crowned hats, blue-clad cavalry officers, and *senoritas* with combs in their hair and a promise in their eyes. Robert E. Lee had been sent down to take command of this military district, war was in the air and old San Antonio was all bustle and excitement. More than one promenading *senorita* tossed a smile in Ames' direction, but he noticed none of them.

As always, his lean, dark face was expressionless, yet in him was a new bitterness. For he was a proud man, he had been fired from his job, and now the whole State knew about it. While inside the cafe drinking coffee, he had read the brief item in a local newspaper. Texas Ranger Lieutenant Pete Ames dismissed from the service. One of the most widely known and efficient men on the force. Captain Cloud refused to make a statement. According to rumor, some tie-up between Ames and group of Border bandits. To be regretted that such a man would betray his State and his oath of allegiance to Texas, but . . . .

Yonder in the middle of the plaza old Crazy McKillian's freight outfit was loading up, the big tarp-covered wagons limned in the red glow of the open fires that rimmed the plaza. Ordinarily, Ames would have been interested in all this, in where McKillian was heading, in what freight he was carrying. But now he turned away, almost violently, muttering, "Ah, damn Joe Cloud!" He turned and came in solid, jostling contact with a young woman.

He did not say anything, did not remove his hat. Caught up in his own bitter thoughts, he simply stared at her, hardly seeing her.

She said, "Well! You almost knocked me down."

"Sorry," Ames said, then.

"You don't sound like it," she snapped. "And just when I had you picked for a Southern gentleman, full of hospitality."

"Most likely, Ma'am," gravely, "what I'm full of is iniquity. But could I buy you-all a demitasse—a mint flip, say, a good ol' suhthen julep?"

Ames was beginning to notice that, even in the dusk, her eyes looked brown and steady; and somehow they gave her a pert, almost impudent look—but maybe he gathered the impudent part from the perky hat that pointed an ostrich plume at him, or from her short, practically snubbed nose. She had on what he took to be a traveling suit—very neat, too—and damned if he wasn't beginning to like her! When she grinned at him, he knew he did.

She said, "So you have got the instincts of a gentleman. And you'd better not disappoint me! Soldiers trying to—to pick me up. Mexicans jingling their big spurs all around. I almost ran this far from the stage station, and now I don't know where I'm going. I mean—"

"Young lady," Ames said with some severity, "San Antone ain't no place for you to be alone in. Especially when you don't know where you're a-goin',"

"But I do know! I'm going to the Menger House. I just don't know where it is. My—My—fiance was supposed to meet me at the stage station, but he wasn't there, and all those—"

"I know," Ames said solemnly. "Spurs a-jinglin' at you. Soldiers tryin' to eat you—big mouths those soldiers got." He took her arm in a firm grip. "To the Menger!"

It wasn't far and he went right on in with her. He watched her write in a firm, almost boyish hand, "Miss Margo Pelham . . . Boston, Mass." He explained to the proprietor about her escort, told him to send a boy for her luggage, then added with a gray-eyed stare, "And see that you look after Miss Margo, proper. Come mawnin', I'll be around to see if you have, sure 'nough."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Ames!" the rotund proprietor said hastily. His eyes dropped to the brace of Colts that hugged Ames' lean thighs, and he added, "You can bet

yo' life I'll look after her, Mr. Ames. Any friend of yours."

Miss Margo Pelham was frowning a little, her brown eyes favoring Ames with a somewhat doubtful scrutiny.

"Well—Mr. Ames," she said, "you seem to have made quite an impression around here. My fiance has written me about Texas gun-fighters and badmen and Rangers. I'm wondering which—"

"Why, he's the fastest damned—" The proprietor coughed delicately, behind a hand the size of a Texas ham. "Beg pardon, Ma'am, but I thought—don't you know—? Why Pete Ames is the best Ranger—er, that is, he—Pete—"

"That's right—was," Ames said. He nodded to the girl. "Miss Pelham, if you're interested in Rangers, and badmen, perhaps the hotel will furnish you a copy of today's newspaper. I'll bid you *adios* now. Have to go meet a man."

"But I haven't even thanked you! I hope I haven't caused you—"

"No, Ma'am"—gravely. "I just have a date to kill a feller, is all."

He went away with the little sharp sound her breath had made still lingering in his ears. He didn't grin, never grinned. But he felt like it.

Who, now, he wondered, could her fiance be?

THE COURTYARD of the Vergara house, that was the place. An old Mexican, with courtly manners and a skin as brown and wrinkled as a prune, led Ames around a roofed inner porch, to a stone bench in the open courtyard. A pale moon rode the sky and here the air was fresh, with the scent of growing things. Ames, puzzled, wondering, made up a cigarette, got it going, then flipped it away and rose to face the huge figure moving toward him through the blue darkness.

"Governor Houston, suh, I am honored."

"Ames! I thought you'd come."

Sam Houston shoved out a big hand. His grip was warm and strong.

"I reckon there's something you don't know, Governor," Ames said. "I'm out of the Rangers. Captain Cloud gave me my walkin' papers—"

Sam Houston chuckled. "Ames, there's not much goes on in the Rangers that I don't know. Not much about you that I don't know, either. Yo' father was a Texas man and a fighter. You come from a family of fighting men, of loyal men. That's why I picked you for this job. Sit down here beside me. We've got quite a lot to go over. Smoke if you like—but give my words yo' most earnest attention."

They settled themselves on the stone bench. Ames still was puzzled, but inside warmth was spreading and he felt better than he had in days. This was Sam Houston, the man his father had all but worshipped, the man who, almost lone-handed, had brought Texas' ragged army through the muddy riverbottoms, to heroic victory at San Jacinto. This was old Sam, here beside him, still holding faith in Pete Ames.

Yonder, in a hackberry tree, a pair of doves were talking plaintively. Small frogs chirped in the darkness, and Sam Houston seemed to be listening to these sounds. Finally, he sighed.

"Ames, I need not tell you how dark the outlook is for our land. States' rights. Slavery. That's the talk you hear, on every hand. It looks like war is sure to come, and the South is confident she can win. Ames, I tell you she can't. In the event of war, the South will go under. Economically, perhaps morally and every other way, she will be set back fifty years. And all a war can accomplish is bitterness, bloodshed. Ames, I have been called a Unionist, an opportunist, an adventurer. Right now my Pacifist Policy is the talk of the State. I don't care, Ames. All I want is to do my best for Texas and for the Union. If I can prevent war I intend to do so, no matter what else happens. I have a plan, Ames. A desperate one, I'll admit. But it is the only way—and I need your help."

"I think, suh, you can count on that," he said quietly.

"No wait! Before you make any promises, I want you to know just how big, how hard a thing I'm asking you to undertake. Ames, you've heard of Juan Cortinas, of course. Have you ever met the man? Talked with him?"

"I've tried," he said dryly.

"He would surprise you, Ames. He is a strong man, capable. He has a small army of men behind him. To accomplish his chief aim, all he needs is a bit of help from our side. Ames, I intend to give him that help."

"Help Cheno Cortinas?" Shock laced through Pete Ames, almost savagely. It put harsh edges to his voice. "My Lord, Sam—Governor! That damned bandit don't need no help. He's got Chappo Galvan and Pasquel Rico, and he's stealin' the Border blind. Yeah, and Carmalita Santoya's a helpin' him!"

"Ames," Sam Houston said soberly, "you're partly correct. Cortinas has, undoubtedly, driven off a few head of cattle. But he's not near the brigand he's painted, nor is Pasquel Rico connected with him in any way. Ames, listen to me!"

And there in the cool darkness of the courtyard, Sam Houston outlined his bold and desperate plan. On this side of the Rio Grande, each county would organize a company of minute men, these to reinforce the thousand Texas Rangers already in the field. The Secretary of War, in Washington, had been requisitioned for percussion and Sharps rifles, for three thousand Colt revolvers, for a thousand cavalry accouterments. "Because," Sam Houston wrote, "Texas must be ready to repel invasion, both from the Indians and Mexico." Yet, actually, old Sam's grand scheme called for the use of both Indians and Mexicans!

"I'll invade Mexico," he went on, his voice strengthening as he visualized that daring accomplisment. "I'll have an army of Rangers, Mexicans and Indians. I'll establish a protectorate over Mexico, open up that rich and fertile land for settlement. There'll be a bigger rush than there was to California, in '49. Can't you see it, Ames? Factional quarrels will be forgotten. I'll save the Union!"

"It just—might work," Ames said slowly. And he was thinking that if such a plan could succeed, Sam Houston was the man to push it through. A statesman, a soldier. Governor of two States and twice President of the Texas Republic. A born leader, Sam Houston might make this plan, this bold scheme go through. Ames asked, "Just what do you want me to do?"

"The whole thing, Ames, pivots around Juan Cortinas. He stands ready now to start moving. All he lacks is guns. Where I got hold of them is beside the point, but I have enough guns for the present. I have the ammunition to go with them. The difficulty lies in getting those supplies to Cortinas. You will understand that, at this stage of the game, I must remain strictly in the background. I want you, Ames, to deliver those guns for me. You will not carry any bill of consignment, any papers. I am sure you already see the danger in the job. Before you give me an answer, think it over, ask me any questions you have in mind."

"Suppose," Ames asked, "the Rangers catch me with those guns?"

'You know how they work," Sam Houston said grimly. "If you made any fight, you'd likely be shot. If they captured you and held you for trial, I might be able to help you. I might not."

"Suppose I got captured by some cavalry detail?"

"Son, that would be worse than the Rangers. For there, certainly I couldn't help you. The best you could hope for would be to stand trial for running contraband. You might even be tried for treason. I couldn't help you, whichever."

"Yes, and whichever." Ames said with a touch of bitterness, "my name in Texas would be mud. I'd be considered a traitor."

"Worse than that, son. But the choice is yours. I want your whole heart, or nothing. You say the word and I'll give you a note—for Captain Cloud."

They both were standing now, and Ames took a sharp step forward. *"You* had me fired!"

"It was the only way, son. I had to have a good man, not connected with tne Rangers. You are that man, out of the entire State. Before I go into further detail about the job, I want your decision, one way or the other."

Ames took three strides away from the big man, then turned to face him. "I'll take the job, suh."

"I was sure you would," Sam Houston

said. "Else I never would have talked so much. You see, Pete, I know Texas men." Again he thrust out his huge hand. "We'll seal the bargain. Shake."

IV

THE SIX BIG TARP-COVERED freight wagons on the plaza were ready to roll out, looming ghostly gray in the dawn. Pete Ames rode up just as Crazy McKillian, standing beside the lead wagon, got his whisky jug up and neatly balanced across the bend of his elbow. The old man's gray goatee waggled in time to his swallowing. The fiery stuff slid down with a faint gurgling sound. Ames really couldn't help it. Recalling an event from the old freighter's dim and distant past, he said in tones of cold authority, "There the damn horse thief stands. Take him, men."

"Oomph! No! Not guilty, by Gawd!" And the old man dropped from under the jug. He hit the ground flat, rolled over twice and came out with a gun.

"Hold it, you old gamecock!" Ames said sharply, jumping his horse to one side. "Didn't know you had that much of a guilty conscience. Besides, yo' likker's a-spillin'."

"Noo!" The old man was up, spry as any squirrel. Tenderly he lifted the jug, squinted one eye at it, then put both eyes on Ames.

"Condemn you, Pete Ames! I got a mind to th'ow so much lead in you they'd need a block and tickle to h'ist you to the saddle. Any man 'ud play sich a trick, I plumb hate his insides. Eternally, perditiously, an' with malice aforethought. Why, dang yo' checkered britches, step down from there and we'll both take a drink. Me fust, you suckin' the hind tit!"

Ames almost smiled. "Where at is my wagon and my hardware goods?"

The old man's eyes suddenly were alert. "Yo' wagon was loaded last night, dead in the dark. Hit'll be waitin' at the Medina Crossin'. Pete, what's plumb peculiar to me, yore hardware is all packed in them long, slim boxes—boxes a dozen rifles, say, would fit into."

"Uh-huh. Just like yo' skinny neck would fit a loop at the end of a rope. With a stout mesquite limb on the other end of it. All right! Let's get rolling."

"Nup. 'Twouldn't be polite. Because we got comp'ny on the way south, and yonder it comes now!"

Old Crazy McKillian's smile was a thing of wicked glee. As Ames swung around in the saddle, he crowed, "Mebby now, b'Gud, you'll worry about yore own neck awhile!" But it is doubtful if Ames heard him. Ames was watching eight cavalrymen move toward him, their black horses at a smart trot.

"Escort detail from the Black Horse troop," Crazy McKillian informed him. "Be'cuse these here wagons is carryin' supplies for the quartermaster, at Ringgold. And in case you don't know it, my laddie-buck, the Black Horse troop is the hell-raisin'est, hard-fightin'est troop on the Border! But we'll pick up yo' hardware wagon at the Modina—and where would you puh-fer to be planted?"

Ames muttered something that sounded like, "Go to hell." Then, in the next breath: "Great god on a mountain!"

For a livery stable buggy had pulled up so close to Ames that he could have flipped his cigarette between the red spokes of its near front wheel. A young cavalry lieutenant, beside the buggy, stepped smartly from saddle as Ames watched. Holding the bridle reins in his gloved right hand, he offered his left to the young woman in the buggy's back seat. With such gallant assistance, she stepped down, laughing. Then she saw Pete Ames and abruptly she sobered, her brown eyes watching Ames. Ames was staring at the girl's escort, his hawkish face as dark and forbidding as a thundercloud.

Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson. He was smiling, his left hand holding the girl's arm. He took one step, saying, "What's the good word, McKillian? All ready to—?" That was when his eyes fell upon Pete Ames. "You!" he said.

For perhaps two seconds their eyes locked, then Ames removed his hat and nodded to the girl.

"Mawnin', Miss Margo," he said gravely. "I trust—I hope the gunfiah last night

never disturbed you."

She took a sharp breath. "I thought you were joking!"

"No'm," shaking his head. "I never joke. But don't you worry yo' pretty little head. He was a skunk, Ma'am. Hahdly worth wastin' powder on."

And not a hint that gunfire was as much a part of this town's life as eating, drinking, or sleeping. Not a suggestion that ever before had he set eyes on Lew Carson.

"Miss Margo, by any chance—this couldn't be yo' fiance? The man supposed to meet you, and wasn't there."

His thin lips at a slight, sardonic angle, he watched the dark crimson flush creep up Lew Carson's neck. Somewhat stiffly, Miss Margo Pelham introduced them. "Mr. Ames, this most certainly is my fiance. Lieutenant Lew Carson."

"We've met," Lew said. "But I can't say—"

"Ah!" Ames cut in wickedly. "Now I remember. You were with that Mexican girl, with the crow's wing hair and them come-to-me eyes. Carmalita Santoya, wasn't it? With the dark and all—but the whole thing comes back to me now." His eyes were hard.

Lew Carson, still holding the reins of his big glossy black, stepped past the girl, pulling the horse along behind him. He put his left hand on his hip, his eyes, blue as gun-steel, stared up at Ames, and he spoke through his teeth.

"It comes back to me now, too. Those threats you made. Well, you've got a saddle under you, and now's as good a time as any. We'll ride out a piece and settle this whole business. That is, if you've got the stomach for it—now that you're no longer a Ranger."

Ames' chuckle was a masterpiece of indulgence. "Mr. Carson, Mr. Carson. Not in the presence of a lady! Besides, we've got plenty of time for you to pick yo' crow with me. You see, I'm going south with you. Clear to the Rio Grande. Got some hardware goods and going to set me up a store. But for now—"

Again he nodded at the girl. "If you'll excuse me, Miss Margo, I've a brief matter to talk over with this crazy old—with our wagon master. Then we'll roll out. Step back here, Mack."

He walked his horse toward the back of the wagon train, with Crazy McKillian trailing him, his white goatee wig-wagging his opinion of the whole blasted business. Ames heard Lew Carson, behind him, making his excuses. "Sorry, Margo. Fellow simply rubs me the wrong way. Supposed to be dangerous, too. But some day . . . ." A wry and humorless smile touched Ames' dark face briefly, then was gone. He led the way around the end wagon of the train, stepped down and faced Crazy McKillian.

"Listen to me now, Mack," he said almost savagely. "I know I can trust you when you're sober. But drunk or sober, if you breathe one word about what you know or what you think's in that wagon waitin' at the Medina—" He caught a handful of the old man's shirt front, shook him quite gently. "You know what I mean, don't you, Mack?"

Crazy McKillian swallowed. Those gray eyes seemed to be staring right through him. He said, "Oh, my gawd, yes! Pete, I allus did say wasn't nuthin' to squench a man's thirst like pure-D plain water. From now on, brother, I even aim to bathe in it!"

THEY reached the Medina shortly after noon. Ames' wagon was waiting—a heavy wagon, its high wooden box, from the driver's seat to the tail boards entirely covered by a heavy tarp that was securely lashed down all around. Beneath that tarp rested twenty cases of rifles and quite a bit of ammunition, all packed in wooden boxes and labeled "Hardware." They might as well, Ames told himself, have been labeled "Hope." For in those boxes, and in the others Sam Houston intended to send after them, lay all of old Sam's hopes for the land he loved and for the land a lot of men loved—including Pete Ames.

And as Ames rode around the wagon, inspecting the lashings, he made a silent promise. This plan of Sam Houston's was a desperate, last-chance plan. The presence of Lew Carson and his troopers made the whole deal a much bigger gamble.

But if life held in Pete Ames, these guns would go through. No one, nothing, was going to stop them . . . .

At Ames' shoulder a voice said, "Mister, I'll have to know what's in that wagon. Orders from Colonel Clendennin. This is a government supply train. Any wagon carrying other than government goods must be inspected."

Ames swung half around in the saddle. Lew Carson, altogether the cavalryman, sat his black horse stiffly erect. His blue eyes seemed to mock Ames.

"Soldier," Ames said quietly, "you're making a mistake. This isn't a government supply train. McKillian doesn't even have a government freight contract. He's simply hauling the goods, in this wagon, for me. You've got no authority to inspect my goods. You're not going to."

Lew Carson stood up in the stirrups. "O'Hare!"

The big sergeant and his seven troopers came down the line of wagons with their mounts at a brisk trot. They pulled up beside Lew Carson, wheeling into line so that they faced Pete Ames. Each mother's son wearing an expectant look. In each pair of eyes little wicked devils dancing.

"O'Hare, take two men. Go through that wagon with a fine-toothed comb."

"Your authority, Carson?" And Pete Ames sat relaxed in his saddle, and only God and the Texas Rangers who had ridden with Ames and a few men who would never ride again, anywhere, knew how fast the man could move, or with what deadly precision.

But Lew Carson smiled. He dropped a hand to his revolver.

"This is my authority, Ames. All the authority I—"

The sound came from the dark live oaks that flanked the Medina, a sound so thin and terror-pitched that a man must strain to recognize it for what it was: the cry of a woman against agony or fear. It froze the rowdy troopers in their saddles. It cut asunder the fragile, shimmering thread that lay between Lew Carson and Pete Ames, so that whatever stormy gods were reaching for them must wait another day.

"Margo!" And Lew Carson had a frog in his throat as he jumped his horse forward. Pete Ames already was on his way. They went down the steep bank in that order, O'Hare and his troopers slamming along behind them.

And there across the narrow stream, shadowy horsemen among the live oaks. And the girl, Miss Margo Pelham, from Boston, half naked on the near bank, struggling desperately as one man, dismounted, sought to lift her to the saddle of a swarthy fellow who reached down for her with eager hands.

Lew Carson, the way of the Cavalry ingrained in him, unholy wrath thickening his throat, shouted, "Horse-holder, O'Hare. Hit the ground and make it hot, across yonder in those oaks." Lew Carson was down in one motion, his revolver in hand and afraid to use it. And O'Hare was down in line with his men, each with one knee on the ground, and one trooper left to hold the horses. They sent a volley of .44 slugs across into the live oaks, but it was like shooting at shadows, and none of this was helping Margo Pelham. Only Pete Ames could help Miss Margo.

For all this happened as one action, and Ames never stopped his horse. The man before him, in saddle, reaching for the girl, threw Ames a single startled glance. His black mustaches were spiked with wax, the scar across his face stood out bone-white. Pasquel Rico, and Ames knew him well! Ames snapped one shot as Rico threw himself along the neck of his horse. But no time for regret. That would come later, bitter as quinine. Right now, that other son!

This one had forgot the girl, was thinking about his own brown hide. He had one foot in the stirrup. He threw a desperate leg across. The long barrel of Ames' Colt cut through the fellow's scalp and he rolled on over his saddle and hit the ground on the far side of his horse. The frightened animal went splashing across the river, following Pasquel Rico. All Ames had to do was to stop the downward arc of his six-shooter at the proper point and let the hammer drop. The fat lead slug caught the unfortunate Mexican between the shoulderblades. It went on through, and when Ames got down and

rolled the fellow over, he could see where the slug had come out.

Margo Pelham lay just beyond the dead Mexican, face against her crossed arms, sobbing her heart out. Lew Carson was running toward her, but all Ames had to do was to take three steps. He stooped. He caught the girl's shoulders and helped her to sit up, and he said, "There, now, Miss Margo. You're fine. You're plumb all right."

She looked past Ames, at the dead Mexican. No flowers, no church music or flowers. She never before had seen death in such a crude and ugly form, never before in her life. She looked at Ames and made a little moaning sound.

Lew Carson was down beside her, then, his strong arms holding her close against him. While across her brown head he stared at Pete Ames with something like condemnation in his eyes.

"I'm grateful, Ames. Damned grateful. But she didn't have to see that. The fellow was already down."

"Maybe," Ames said harshly, "we should have played drop the handkerchief." And then, because the thought of Pasquel Rico, still alive, was a violent and bitter thing in his mind, he added: "You ready now to inspect my wagon? I don't believe you're up to it!"

Lew Carson shook his yellow head. "There's plenty of time. Perhaps I was a bit hasty. I'll talk to McKillian. But," he finished with a huge disgust, "of all the men in Texas, Ames, I can't see why I have to be under obligation to you."

"No obligation," Ames said. "It was a pleasure. I might do as much for you sometimes."

His eyes still held violence enough to emphasize the flat words. And Lew Carson looked into those eyes and smiled.

"Whenever you get ready, Ames," he murmured.

V

THE SECOND NIGHT OUT they camped on the Atascosa. Since they left the Medina, Ames had not let the wagon, with its cargo of guns and ammunition, get out of his sight. His whiskers were beginning to itch and he could do with a bath, so when Lew Carson took his rifle and rode off into the dusk, Ames strolled down to the river. He found a properly secluded spot, stripped and bathed and put his boots and pants back on. He was shaving as best he could without benefit of a mirror when, behind him, he heard a faint sound. His reaction was instinctive, and fast.

His six-shooter lay near his hand. He was on his heels, facing the river. And in the next instant he was around, and Miss Margo Pelham was staring, wide eyed, at a man stripped to the waist, holding a razor in one hand and a Colt .44 in the other. A man who wore a ruff of white lather around his chin, and whose gray eyes looked black and forbidding in the gathering darkness.

"Oh, my goodness!" Miss Margo said. "It's *you*."

"Me," Ames said, "the beast, himself. Suppose it hadn't been? Suppose it had been—Pasquel Rico? You little idiot." didn't Carson tell you not to leave camp? Go on away. Go on back."

He had thought to go over his chin a second time. Now, he snapped the razor shut, turned and scooped up water and washed the lather off his face. When he turned back, the girl was still watching him.

"I'll go where I please," she informed him. "A girl at least has to wash her face. Besides, after last night I don't think those men will bother me. But don't think I followed you! I just came down to wash."

"You disappoint me," Ames murmured. "And you don't know Pasquel Rico. That *hombre* don't scare easy. He had some reason for showin' up this far from the Border, in the vicinity of this particular wagon train, and I'd give a pretty to know what that reason was. Me, I'm thinkin' we'll see more of Don Pasquel."

"You frighten me, Mr. Ames. My blood's all a-tingle. Wait, please until I wash some of the dirt off my poor face, and I'll walk back to camp with you."

They were on the way back, beneath the gloom of the giant trees, when she said, "Mr. Ames, I—would you mind telling

me why you hate that man so? Pasquel Rico."

Ames' mind flashed back to three lonely graves on a black-brush ridge. Kenny, Sallie and Bodie Ames. Killed by Border bandits . . . . The old savage bitterness washed over him, and came up in his throat and turned his voice quite ugly.

"I hate him for what I suspect and for what I know. There was an old storekeeper, on the Rio Grande. Kind old feller, wouldn't hurt a fly. Rico swung him from a rafter and cut his throat. Is that enough reason to hate him?"

She shuddered. "I wouldn't want you to hate me, Pete Ames." But she moved closer to him.

Yonder now, back from the river a piece, they could see the glow of the camp fire. She stepped ahead of him and turned to face him, so that he had to stop.

"Pete, I'm not usually nosey, but you interest me. A man with your capabilities. I can't help but wonder why you're no longer with the Rangers. Why, Pete?"

In the soft darkness, the face turned up to his might have been the face of a little girl. There was trust in it, and a sort of childish curiosity. Except, Ames told himself, she wasn't any child. She was a young woman, with courage, with intelligence, with enough charm about her to attract any man—even a hard-bitten fellow like Pete Ames . . . . Yes, dammit, he did like her. He liked her a lot.

He said, "There might be a lot of reasons, Margo. Maybe I got too free and reckless with my guns. Maybe I just wasn't wuth a whoop. Captain Cloud told me I was spendin' too much time on personal business."

"Was that true?"

"In a way, yes. There is some business that comes before everything else." And Ames marveled at himself, Pete Ames, answering questions. Personal questions. He said, "We better get on."

"Wait! I want to know one more thing." She laid her hand on his arm. "What's wrong between you and Lew? What happened that night . . . when he was with Carmalita?"

So there it was again. The sight of them, Carmalita and Lew Carson, in the lamp-lit doorway. The violent anger, the shock of a slugging fist, Lew Carson's fist; and Chappo Galvan, thanks to Carson, escaping unharmed in the darkness . . . . Then the kid, Rusty Ware, with a dagger in his back and his boyish grin gone forever—just another mark in the account book Pete Ames kept in his mind. A mark he might someday chalk up against Lew Carson as being an accessory to that crime.

Some of the feeling of that night came back to Ames, and he caught her shoulders almost savagely.

"Little lady, those are questions you'll have to ask yo' friend Lew. Let's get on to'rds—"

The scrape of a boot. The figure of Lew Carson looming tall in the dusk. Past the girl's shoulder, Ames watched him. Regret for what Lew Carson must be thinking pricked Ames' mind sharply and was gone, leaving only a lifting eagerness. He stood that way, deliberately, his hands still holding the girl's shoulders.

"Get away from her, Ames. No matter what Margo might think of you, she is under my protection. I won't have a damned traitor pawing her around."

"So," Ames said, and he took a step forward and his left hand turned the girl and moved her firmly to one side. "A traitor, now? That's a serious charge, Carson. I'm waitin' foh yo' explanation."

"I've been talking to McKillian," Lew Carson said. "From what he tells me, it is my duty to inspect your wagon. I want you present when I do so. Whatever personal matter lies between us can wait. I'm ready to make the inspection, now."

On the small breeze came a brass-lunged shout. "Ho, McKillian! How's for feedin' three hungry fellers? Great guddelmighty, man, we're plumb wore out."

"No," Ames said. "No, Lew, you won't inspect my wagon. Not tonight." And in the soft darkness neither Lew Carson nor the girl saw Ames' hand move; but there it was, a Walker Colt that weighed close to five pounds. Ames continued in the gentlest of voices: "You will turn around, Lew. You will walk ahead of me, back to camp."

"Don't be a fool!" Lew ripped out. I've

got eight troopers to back me, man. You haven't got a chance."

"Turn around and march," Ames said. "I'm afraid there's something in camp that you don't know about."

Lew Carson shrugged. "It's on your head, Ames."

THE tarp-covered wagons were pulled up in a lose semicircle beyond the camp fire. On one side of the fire stood Sergeant O'Hare and three of his troopers, truculently staring at the three big-hatted men who stared back at them. Mike McMaloney was the first one to notice Ames. He took note of the girl's distressed face, of the stiff way Lew Carson carried himself, and he began grinning.

"Ho, Moggie, you old stud! Whut kind of comp'ny's this you're a-keepin'?"

Jim Allers shook his head sadly. "Po' ol' Pete," he said, "done gone to hell in a basket."

And Reese Lockerby, the third Ranger, asked, "Can you still sing, Moggie? We done rode two hundred miles, jest to heah yo' golden voice."

But despite all the banter, the three Rangers were alert. Something queer was going on here. Pete Ames appeared to be in the middle of it. And whatever it was, their impulse was to side Ames—certainly not the Cavalry.

Mike McMaloney said, "Pete, we trailed Pasquel Rico and ten, twelve fellers clean up from the Border. Seen the fire, here, and dropped by to warn whose-ever outfit this was. Rico's up to somethin', we dunno whut. You—uh—hubbin' anything?"

Ames slid his weapon back into its holster, took two steps away from Lew Carson. He shook his head. "Just a little disagreement, Mike, which you boys can settle for me. I've got a shipment of goods in that wagon yonder—hardware. As a private citizen, bohn in Texas, I ask you—has the United States Cavalry got the right to search my wagon?"

Big Mike, never a fast thinker, frowned portentously. "Whut's in the wagon, Moggie?"

"What would any Border store carry, Mike? Tinware, harness, mebby a few ca'tridges. You recollect that little *tienda* where we found the old feller with his th'oat cut? Well, I aim to reopen it for business. Just don't appreciate these boys in blue britches pokin' around my goods. Won't let 'em."

"Yeah, and I don't blame you," Mike growled. "And I recollect, that night, how you saved mine and Rusty Ware's bacon. But Pete, you know whut Cap'n Cloud's orders is, concernin' any freight outfit headin for the Rio Grande. Pete, you wouldn't mind old Mike takin' a peek inside that there wagon?"

"I'll agree to that," Lew Carson snapped. "You inspect it, Ranger, and put the monkey on your back. I'll tell you what you'll find. About twenty cases of—"

"Tha's right. Long, shlim cases. Ol' Pete Ames, besh Ranger in Texas—done turned run-gunner. Pore ol' Pete. Hate to shee it. Lesh all take a drink."

And old Crazy McKillian, who had come staggering from beneath the near wagon, wagged a finger in front of Ames' nose, said, "Shame—shame on you," and went staggering off, carrying his jug with him.

Mike McMaloney and the other two Rangers were watching Ames, uneasily. The other four troopers came up and fell in beside O'Hare, and Lew Carson stood ready and waiting, not smiling.

"Yonder's my wagon, Mike, where you boys tied yo' horses," Ames said. "Go ahead with yo' inspection."

And not a hint that he knew full well what was going on inside big Mike McMaloney's head. Not a suggestion that this was the biggest gamble of his life, for Texas, for the Union, and for Sam Houston. Troopers and Rangers, they moved over to the wagon. Mike McMaloney loosed the lashings along one side, and using a wheel hub for a step, he threw back the tarp and climbed into the wagon box. And then it was loyalty to a friend, against duty; Sam Houston's desperate, magnificent plan against utter disgrace for Pete Ames, or possibly against a hang-rope. For big Mike, as soon as he set eyes on them, would be in little doubt as to what those long, slim boxes contained.

So there was that tense interval that seemed a lifetime, while Mike rummaged around inside the wagon and a cold sweat broke out on Pete Ames. Then a sulphur match flared. Big Mike's head and shoulders appeared.

"Wan square box," he announced, "labeled 'Plow points.' Wan long box, busted open. Grubbin' hoes an' shovels, and, b'gawd, I see 'em!"

He glared at Lew Carson, ducked, struck another match, then straightened out again.

"Butcher knives, canned tomatoes, lanterns—and who in gawddel-mighty's world said they was any rifles? Dum yo' blue britches, Lootenant, you're a-wastin' my time!"

"And you're pulling my leg," Lew returned with a bitter conviction. "You're sticking your neck out a yard, Ranger, simply because you used to ride with Ames. I'll take a look in that wagon myself."

"Will, huh?" And Mike McMalóney dropped a hand to his six-shooter; Jim Allers and Reese Lockerby stepped in between the troopers and the wagon. The face of each Ranger wore a scowl. Big Mike said, "Lootenant, you're overruled. This here wagon of Moggie's is a-packin' mostly farm implements. One of the duties of us Rangers is to promote agr'culture and he'p the farmers, and that's whut we're a-doin'. You wanna make an issue of it?"

O'HARE and his troopers were giving the Rangers back scowl for scowl. O'Hare growled something about giving a month's pay to catch the big son by himself, just one time. "Play the long roll on that bully boy, from his rump to his brisket!"

But Lew Carson clipped, "At ease, O'Hare." Then he put a frosty stare on Pete Ames, and his words were as deliberate as dropped stones.

Don't think you're bluffing me, Ames. It's just that if I tangle with the Rangers, there'll be hell to pay, all around. But I'll tangle with them if I have to. Before your wagon reaches the Rio Grande, it will be inspected."

He spun half around. "O'Hare, set your first guard."

Ames favored Lew Carson with the faintest of smiles. "Lieutenant," he said politely, "befo' you do any inspectin', you'll have to catch me, because I'm rollin' south, tonight."

He spoke a crisp order that sent three of the Mexican teamsters hurrying for his mules, and Mike McMaloney growled, "Yeah, and the boys and me will tag along with you a piece, Moggie. Just to see that these here smart sojers don't change their feeble minds."

Miss Margo Pelham had missed none of this. She was watching Ames in that steady way she had, and now she spoke for the first time.

"You are carrying guns, Pete Ames—guns that likely will be used against your own people. And I thought you had courage. I thought there was something in you that was decent. My only hope is that they catch you before you get a chance to spend the money you get for your load of guns."

Pete Ames stared at her. He stared at her for a long time. He couldn't help the bitterness that welled up inside him; but he was a man who kept control of himself, always, and he allowed none of that bitterness to color his words. He tried to keep cool.

"I'm sorry, Miss Margo," he said. "More sorry than I can say. But all I can tell you now is goodbye."

He turned and walked away from her, toward where his horse was staked. He thought that he would never see her again, and he told himself that it made no difference whether he did see her or not. For she was Miss Margo Pelham, from Boston, the daughter of a United States Senator. She was not for a rough Texas Ranger. She was soon to be Lew Carson's wife . . . .

A sense of loss rose up inside Pete Ames.

He saw the Mexicans coming with the mules, and he shouted at them.

"You lazy sons of sin, get 'em hitched. Get those mules hitched up. Guns, hardware, or butcher knives, that load's going south. God pity whoever tries to stop me."

VI

LEW CARSON WATCHED PETE Ames, his escort of three Rangers, and the wagon become dim shadows and disappear in the night. Lew turned, and what he saw in Miss Margo Pelham's eyes was more than amazing. The light of the campfire was full upon her. Her brown eyes held scorn and condemnation; the stare of them hit him with a sickening shock.

"I respected you, Lew," she said. "I thought you were so gallant and brave. I thought you were a real trooper. I don't know whether I'll ever get over this. Pete Ames—I thought you would stop him. You've got eight men, and it was your duty to stop him. To arrest him. He bluffed you, Lew. He's running guns to Mexico, and there's going to be trouble. Dad says so. That's why the Cavalry is down here—to patrol the Rio Grande. To stop such as this. Lew—Lew—"

Her voice choked and she turned and went running. Lew stared after her, too surprised, too hurt to try to stop her or to defend himself. He watched her climb into the lead wagon, where she slept. A savage bitterness whipped through him, and he thought of old Crazy McKillian and his jug. But that stuff couldn't help him; his sense of duty wouldn't let him drink it, if it could. He strode to his blankets, making himself a promise that he didn't put into words. A promise that had to do with the happiness and the near future of the one he held responsible for his troubles: Ex-Ranger Pete Ames, sometimes by his friends called "Maggie." Sometimes called a lot of other things.

Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson—he had spent better nights in the Indian lands, with red boys all around him. With him that way, unable to sleep, it was hard to see how she managed it. But next morning, Miss Margo Pelham was not to be found. No doubt she had bribed one of the Mexicans, guarding the livestock, to saddle a horse for her. Lew found a note in the wagon, with her blankets.

LEW:

I am going to follow Ames and his guns. Think it important to know the final destination of those guns. I'll try to get word to Colonel Clendennin.

That hasty note, written by Miss Margo Pelham, from Boston, daughter of a United States Senator. Lew Carson read it, and in his mind he could see the cold condemning eyes of Senator Pelham. He turned and shouted, "O'Hare!" He had made his decision, and because he knew that decision would break him, a lot of old memories chased through his mind: Saw-toothed winds off the Hudson, when every eager cadet saw himself wearing no less than a general's stars . . . . Burning pain of an arrow pinning a young lieutenant's leg to the saddle, and the reckless idiot waving his saber, yelling for his men to come on . . . . Stench and red filth of a buffalo wallow—"Heads up Collingsworth. You'll live to make a trooper . . . ."

"Sergeant O'Hare! You will take charge of the escort detail. Tuesday evening should see you at Ringgold. My respects to the Colonel, and tell him I'll report whenever I have the Colonel's guest, Miss Pelham, safe in hand."

And O'Hare, with his own memories, stubbornly speaking against half a lifetime of Army discipline: "But Lew!—Lieutenant Ames, my Lord, sir, not even you—! The Old Man will break you, sure as . . ."

"You have your orders, Sergeant O'Hare. My horse, Sergeant. On the double."

Lieutenant Lew Carson, for the first time and with war looming, going against orders, tossing aside a chance for a brilliant career, because only Lew—and the gods who look after such a one—knew how much he loved her . . . .

PETE AMES, driving the four little Spanish mules himself now, rolled on southward, up on the high seat of the wagon, wondering about a lot of things. His destination, an old Spanish mission, long abandoned, on the Rio Grande. His orders to deliver the guns to the men who would meet him at the mission. "For Texas and the Union"—those were the identifying words the contact men would use. Ames did not know if the men would

be brown or white, knew nothing about them, but the whole business was beginning to seem melodramatic. He wondered if he were being an utter fool.

He remembered the scorn, the condemnation in Miss Margo Pelham's eyes. Even Mike McMaloney, riding just ahead yonder, doubted him. But Sam Houston, that wise old patriot thought there was an outside chance of averting war, of saving the Union. He had given his word to old Sam, and he intended to keep that word, no matter what happened.

Mike McMaloney and the two Rangers with him had stopped their horses. Ames halted the mules and sat looking down at the three men, knowing that here Sam Houston's grand plan might end.

Mike McMaloney said, diffidently, "Well, Moggie, we got to turn off here. Moggie, them long flat boxes—you wouldn't?"

Big Mike bogged up, then. His red face seemed to grow more violent in hue. Pete Ames said, "No, Mike, I wouldn't. Whatever might be in those boxes, I'd never do anything to hurt Texas. I say that as a friend, Mike. I give you my word."

Mike's breath whistled out with a great sighing sound. "That sure makes me feel better, Moggie. You know Cap'n Cloud's orders. Any wagon train that looks suspicious, we're supposed to go through it. But condemn it, Moggie! Whether you got rifles, Gatlin guns, or plug tobacco in them boxes, I believe you! And Moggie, you mixed in anything that maybe you need help on? You want me to—to tag along a little fu'ther?"

A good warm feeling, a rare feeling, brought a brightness to Ames' eyes. This big Irishman was sticking his neck out a yard, taking a chance with his own job, because he believed in Pete Ames.

Ames said gruffly, "No, Mike. I'll make out. Maybe some day we'll ride together again. So long Mike."

Ames camped that night on the bank of a dry creek. It was, he judged, about fifteen miles to the Rio Grande. By the way of an old cart road it should be about thirty miles to the mission. A hard day's drive, and he wondered again who would meet him there. Chappo Galvan? Perhaps. Surely not Juan Cortinas, himself. And what, he asked himself, was Pasquel Rico doing, following the government wagon train? It wasn't surprising that Rico had tried to grab Margo. That was in his nature. But what was Pasquel Rico doing that far north of the Border? What part did Carmalita Santoya play in this?

Ames hobbled out his mules. He built up a small campfire, broiled bacon, made coffee. Margo Pelham, he thought—she despised him. That, he guessed, was one of the penalties he had to pay. "Kenny, Sallie, and Bodie Ames—killed by Border bandits . . . ." Ames took a swallow of coffee, and he thought, "That was one debt I aimed to pay. Bodie, you understand, don't you? Sam asked me. Sam believes in this, and I got to go through with it."

Ames held the steaming cup near his lips, his head cocked to the small breeze. He moved away from the fire, listening, alert as the hoofbeats came on.

The rider was slender, boyish looking, on a big black horse. From the shadow of the brush Ames said, "That's far enough, Announce yo'se'f."

The rider stoped. A small voice said, "I—I'm looking for Pete Ames."

"Margo!" Pete said. "Miss Pelham! What—?"

Later, she explained it to Pete. Her fiance, Lew Carson, she said, had been rather ungentlemanly. In fact—with a smile for Pete—he had accused her of taking the part of an unprincipled gunrunner, a crook and a traitor of the first water. So—

"Pete—Mr. Ames, could I go on to Ringgold with you? I wouldn't—" And here she stamped her foot and real tears gleamed in her eyes. "I wouldn't marry Lew Carson if he were the last man on earth! I told him—Pete, you'll look after me, won't you? You'll see me on safe to Ringgold?"

"No," Ames said. "I'm sorry. Dammit, girl, do you have to keep giving me trouble!"

She began to weep then, in earnest. If she regretted leaving Lew Carson and coming on here, Miss Margo Pelham was far from showing it.

Ames said, "Look here, young woman!" He caught her shoulders. "I'm not going to Ringgold. You've got to go back, you hear me? I can't be bothered with—"

"And I thought you were a gentleman."

Somehow, she was close against him. Ames couldn't help it. His arms reached and pulled her to him, and he said, "Ah, you little fool. You nervy little idiot. What is it you want? Why did you ever come to this country, in the first place? Great cats on a mountain!"

"I came to visit Colonel Clendennin—his wife," she sobbed. "They are old friends of ours. But I never thought Lew . . . "

Harshly Ames said, "Well, you're into it now. You'll have to go on with me. My business is important. It means more than my life, or your life. It might look bad—just you and me, together—but you brought that on. I can't help it. I can't turn back. You understand?"

"Yes, Pete," she murmured. "Somehow, I trust you."

Ames gave her a long and searching look. He said, "I'd like to be able to return that, to say that I trust you, too. But I don't know. I'll fix you a bed under the wagon. I'll be right close by, and I sleep like a cat."

Ames still hadn't made up his mind about the girl, two days later, as they jolted along beside the gloomy live oaks that flanked the Nueces. Margo sat beside Ames, on the wagon seat, but he wasn't even thinking about her. This country was all familiar to him. It brought back memories, nostalgic and bitter-sweet. "Kenny, Sallie and Bodie Ames . . . ." Almost as if talking to himself, Pete Ames said, "I used to fish in that river when I was a kid. Used to ride this brush like a young Comanche. This is my land, Margo. I guess I still own it."

She said, "You mean you—you bought it?"

"My daddy bought it. Paid for it, at San Jacinto, with part of his life's blood. He loved Texas. I guess he loved the Lone Star more than I do."

She made him explain. She said, "You mean your father was a soldier?"

"Under Sam Houston. They paid those soldiers in land. Margo, those old timers—I can't explain it to you . . . how much they loved Texas. But that same blood runs in my veins, and now me, Bodie Ames' son—I'm known as the fellow who was kicked out of the Rangers. If things don't break right, I'll be the most despised man in Texas."

THEY went on through the gathering dusk in silence, until finally, in a voice strangely gentle, Margo Pelham said, "I can't understand you, Pete Ames. You're bitter. You hold yourself aloof from friendliness. Maybe you do love Texas, but you've got a load of guns back there in this wagon. I know you have! And I—I simply can't understand it. Why, Pete? What makes you—how can you—?"

Ames stopped the wagon. His voice rasped like a file on steel. "You want to know why I'm a killer? Go with me up on that black-brush ridge. Maybe I can explain part of it."

They climbed the black-brush ridge. Wind and rain had leveled the three mounds of earth, but Ames found the pine board, blown down, half buried. He lifted it and thrust it out and said, "Can you read any words, Margo?"

"*K-e-n-n*" she said, "and *k-i-l* That's all I can make out, Pete."

"Then I'll tell you what it said." Ames said harshly. "'Kenny, Sallie and Bodie Ames, killed by Border bandits.' That's what it said, Margo. They were my folks. Until I settle with the ones responsible, I'll never rest easy."

He went on then, in a rush, telling this girl from Boston things he had never told a living person. How he had fought in the Mexican War. How he had come home to find the three mounds of earth and the pine-board marker on this wind-swept hill. How he had joined the Rangers and made a bold name for himself, because there was hate and bitterness in his heart. "But," he said, "I never caught up with them. I never found the men who murdered my folks. It looks like now I never will."

He turned away from her and stared across the dark mesquite, loneliness and

bitterness growing in him and filling him with violence. She touched his arm gently.

"I'm glad you told me, Pete. I understand you better, now. But the guns—how could you get mixed up in such a thing?"

He whirled. He caught her arms savagely. This girl somehow had got close to him. He wanted to tell her the whole thing. He wanted her to believe in him. The promise he had made to Sam Houston held him silent. He shook her a little.

"I can't tell you anything about those guns. You'll just have to think what you want to about me. I'd never do anything to hurt Texas, though I can't expect you to believe that."

Slowly, almost wonderingly, she said, "No, I shouldn't. But, somehow, I do. For all its thorns and gun-fighters and violence, I believe you love this land, Pete Ames. You're a strange man. Whenever I'm with you, I believe in you. But maybe I'm just some sort of a fool."

A warmth grew in Pete Ames, and he stared at her. He wanted to pull her to him, for there was a loneliness in him. He wanted to kiss her full, sweet lips, for he had never known another woman such as her. He spoke gruffly, against the feeling that gripped him.

"Just two more days, Margo. We'll spend the night at our old ranch house. We'd better get on back to the wagon."

He took her arm and turned her. Past her shoulder, on the brushy ridge to westward, he saw a lone horseman thrown in sharp relief by the low red sun. With distance and the sun's rays against him, Ames saw the rider only as a silhouette that might have been cut from black paper. But something like a chill chased down his spine. He said nothing to the girl, but the thought of Pasquel Rico came dark in his mind . . . .

This night, Ames didn't even try to sleep. He fixed a bed for Margo on a sagging wall bunk inside the old ranch house. This was the room he had shared years ago with his kid brother, Kenny, and just being inside it brought an ache to Ames' throat. A new moon, poised above the mesquite tops, threw a faint mellow glow across the room, and Ames paused in the doorway, with that moonlight flooding past him, and looked back at Margo Pelham. She stared back at him, unsmiling, entirely still.

She said, "Pete, has any woman ever meant anything to you?"

Ames considered the question, his lean face sober, that night, when he had seen Lew Carson take Carmalita in his arms, flashing into his mind. He said, "Two—maybe. A man like me doesn't have much time."

"Pete, is one of them Carmalita?"

"Maybe," Ames said. "But don't ask me about the other one."

She kept watching him, while yonder in the mesquites coyotes began quarreling, that lonesome sound making these two beings, a man and a woman, actually aware of each other and of their isolation. The moon's slanting rays brought a radiance to her face, a mystery to her eyes, and Pete Ames thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He took a step toward her, then the knowledge cut through him, knife sharp, that this Margo Pelham, from Boston, belonged to Lew Carson. She was from a different world, really, and could never be possessed by a man like him. He was turning away when she spoke again, softly.

"I won't ask about the other woman, Pete Ames. But I think you are a man any woman could be proud of."

Later, Ames sat with his back against a wagon wheel, smoking countless cigarettes. He asked himself, for the hundredth time, if this dangerous plan of Sam Houston's could possibly work out. It was like playing with fire, with Pete Ames the man most likely to get burned. That part made no difference. But Texas—Lord, should any man assume such a responsibility! Suppose the plan went wrong?

Ames started walking. Past the pack-pole corrals, past the crumbling smokehouse and the memories of a thousand mesquite chunks that he had fed that adobe monster as a kid. Almost, he could smell the pungent smoke, the curing sausages and venison hams. And he remembered that his father, after the black powder smoke of San Jacinto, had been proud of this ranch; Bodie Ames had taken pride in the little things, the way he cured meat,

and to him mesquite-wood smoke was the sweetest smoke in all the world. Bodie Ames would never have shirked a responsibility. Sam Houston never had. Old Sam believed in his plan, and Bodie Ames would have backed him. If life stayed in him, Pete Ames promised silently, he was going to stick by old Sam.

Ames was moving back toward the wagon when he heard Margo scream, her voice rising to a shrill pitch of terror.

"Pete! Pete! Don't let it!"

She was standing in the middle of the bunk house when Ames burst through the door. Her arm rigid as a bar of iron, she pointed across the room.

"It went that way!"

"You're all right," Ames said.

She threw herself against him. She put her face against his chest, and her arms did their best to pop his ribs.

Awkwardly, Ames patted her back. "What was it? Girl, great cats on a mountain! What kind?" She had jolted him severely. His eyes searched the room beyond her, and then he saw the ferocious beast. It wasn't a wolf, though he had expected no less. It wasn't even a rabbit. It was a big blue pack rat, sitting on its haunches near the wall, wriggling its whiskers in friendly curiosity.

"It ran right across the bed, Pete!"

Pete couldn't help it. With his cupped hand, he pressed her head against him. And for the first time in many a year, Pete Ames was laughing. Laughing so hard that tears came in his eyes.

It wasn't funny to Miss Margo. She burst into tears, like any woman, and her fists beat a savage tattoo against his chest.

"Let me go! You let me go, Pete Ames, you—you—!"

At that moment, Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson appeared in the doorway.

VII

LEW HAD HEARD MARGO'S scream. He saw Pete Ames pulling the girl toward him, saw Margo struggling to free herself. Luck, stubbornness, and the garbled directions of a Mexican woodcutter had brought Lew Carson this far. A savage and merciless wrath carried him the rest of the distance. He forgot his service revolver. He simply drove his arms and shoulders between the pair, cleaving them apart. The girl gasped, "Lew!" and his right arm swung violently and sent her spinning.

"Carson," Ames said sharply.

Lew Carson's fist smashed against his mouth, staggered him.

"Carson, wait! You damn-fool!" he shouted.

Lew pounced like a big cat. His slugging fists drove Ames backward, and only the wall saved him from falling. Lew waited. Ames put both hands flat against the wall and shook his head. Blood from his battered lips was salty in his mouth. The blood in his veins sang like wine.

He said, "I tried, Carson. You wouldn't listen. You've been beggin' for this a long time."

Ames charged as a bull charges, with his head low, his legs driving. Lew Carson didn't give an inch. He sent his hard fists against Ames like rocks. Ames never stopped. When his head and shoulders crashed against Lew Carson, the impact was terrific. Lew was carried backward, almost lifted from the floor. The open doorway was behind him, and Ames drove him through it. They hit the ground outside with Lew on the bottom. Lew grunted and heaved and tried to butt Ames in the face with his head. Then they were up again, toe to toe, slugging . . .

"You stop it, Lew Carson, you started it! You stop it, now, or I'll brain you!"

Around to the other side, and: "Pete Ames, if you hurt him, I'll kill you! I mean it! I've got a club!"

And *whack!* She swung, indiscriminately it seemed. Pete Ames stumbled, Lew leaped after him. Miss Margo's mesquite club made a fine cracking sound across Lew's silky head, and Lew reeled in a slow dazed circle, sat down and grinned as foolishly as if he'd been slugged by the Old Man's best bourbon.

"Now!" Miss Margo said. Then she cried, "Lew!"

She dropped to her knees beside him. Lew shook his head and snorted. "Where is he, where is he at? What a blow!"

Margo blinked. "Lew, you don't—

know?" Then, hastily, "You just sit there, Lew, I'll fix him!"

"Shut up," Pete Ames said suddenly, savagely. "Listen."

His six-shooter came into his hand, and he edged over into the shadow of the ranch house. Two riders loomed up, breaking from the brush to southward, coming on slowly.

They could not see Pete Ames. Lew and Margo were dim figures in the edge of the moonlight. It was the tarp-covered wagon, Ames told himself, that made them cautious. He watched the pair pull up, then a low, husky voice called, "'Allo, Rancho Ames. Anybody is here?"

Lew Carson exclaimed, "Carmalita!" Ames said not a word. It wasn't Pasquel Rico; that was one blessing. But what was Carmalita doing here? The thought of her, as always, made his heart step up a beat.

His hand and the gun in it remained rock-still.

He heard Carmalita cry, "Lew!" She gave the name a warm intonation. He saw her step down, lithe and graceful, and move toward Lew Carson and Margo. When, with a valiant effort Lew got to his feet and stood swaying, Ames' thin lips formed a slanting and sardonic line. For with a little cry of sympathy, utterly ignoring Miss Margo Pelham, Carmalita went running, a mother running to a hurt child. "Lew—*corazon mia,* you are dying!"

Nice dramatics, Ames thought. Trust Carmalita! Then, when she laid her head against Lew's chest, Ames stiffened. He scowled. Such a thing as carrying a good thing too far! By Casoose, there was! Plumb disgustin'!

Chappo Galvan's big-roweled spurs jingled as he pushed forward. His big sombrero rode the back of his head, a black-butted Colt weighted each hip, and with his pockmarked face and his eyes black sin. Miss Margo, with those eyes staring at her, stepped hastily backward: Something, Ames thought, to tell Boston about. If she ever saw Boston again.

Ames stepped into the moonlight, his six-shooter ready. "Lift 'em, Chappo. Nup! Think again. I said lift 'em."

Chappo shrugged, started his hands upward. Carmalita cried, "Stop it, Pete Ames! Why—?"

"That," Ames said, "is what I want to know. What are you and Chappo doing here? I want the truth, and I want it now."

"We came to—to warn you," the girl said hurriedly. "Pete, that Pasquel Rico knows about this hardware. He has a spy riding with Cheno Cortinas. Rico went toward San Antonio to make sure the hardware came through. So the plan is changed. Rico and his men, we think, will wait at the mission. But Chappo knows these *senderos* more better than the palm of his hand. We will take over here and go through the brush—cross the Rio Grande at a lower crossing."

"Ames, you miserable traitor!"

LEW CARSON'S REVOLVER made a blue gleam as he whipped it upward. The long barrel of Ames' Colt struck Lew's wrist with a whacking sound. Lew grunted, cursed softly. The revolver dropped from his hand.

The toe of Ames' boot sent the revolver skittering away. "I'll run this show, Carson. Don't make me hurt you."

An edge of steel came in Lew's voice, an edge of contempt. "You'll have to do more than hurt me, Ames. You'll have to kill me. That fellow there, Chappo Galvan, is an out and out renegade. Cortinas' right-hand man. I can't understand any Texan, any American, who would furnish guns to be used against his own people! Ames, if you go through with this, you're the lowest man on earth. I'll track you down and kill you, if it's the last thing I ever do."

"And I'll help him," Margo said, her bitter anger making her voice shaky. "Dad will use his influence. The cavalry—the Rangers you used to ride with—they'll hunt you down, Pete Ames. You—you—" Her chin began to tremble. "You're no better than a dog."

Ames had stepped back from them. He could see Margo's set, white face. He could see, could almost feel, the scorn and the violence that poured from Lew Carson's eyes. He said harshly, with finality, "Now you've told me. Now I know what

to expect. I don't blame either of you for the way you feel. I'll try to see Miss Margo safely out of this. But first—" He stared straight at Carmalita, his eyes gray and threatening as lead bullets.

"What you said makes sense. But I've got to know which side you're on. You say Rico got wind of this shipment, through a spy. Maybe you learned about it the same way. After that night when Rusty Ware was killed, I've had little reason to trust you, Lord knows. Do you have any way to convince me?"

They stood side by side, the two women, the only two women who ever had meant anything in Pete Ames' violent and bitter life. Miss Margo Pelham, from Boston, staring at Ames with a cold hostility, though her lips trembled for what might have been. And Carmalita Santoya, from Old Mexico or some other place, her fine-molded breasts stirring from the fire that was in her, her eyes watching Pete Ames with both a mystery and a promise.

"You are so blind, Pete Ames" she said. huskily. "You have no more eyes in your head than a moonstruck calf. Your side—the right side—you—you idiot! My grandfather fought with Don Samuel at San Jacinto. From my family comes one of those fifty-eight who signed the Texas Declaration of Independence. But I must *convince* you! When Texas comes to trouble again, Carmalita Santoya works for Texas! She fights for Texas! For Texas and the Union. Those were the words. Didn't Don Samuel Houston tell them to you?"

"Girl," Ames said, with a frog in his throat, "you'll do. You'll do to ride the river with. Chappo! Catch up those mules, staked yonder. We're headin' on south with that wagon, now. We've got to go fast. Because if you two could find me here, Pasquel Rico can do the same. Jump to it, Chappo!"

Chappo Galvan's white teeth gleamed. He said, *"Seguro, mi Capitan,"* and he went running. And Ames was cursing himself for being so blind. Chappo and Carmalita, with their fine dark eyes, the flash of their smile, their fire, their daring. Why, a mule with blinders on could see it! That native Texas son who had fought beside old Bodie—one they called "Nubbin' Arm"—he was Carmalita's grandpop. Bodie used to say that old Nubbin' Arm Charlie Santoya could throw his rifle across the nub and shoot a lot faster and straighter than most men with two hands. Forget it, Carmalita. Forgive a wool-headed Texan with gunpowder for brains . . . .

Ames' Colt lifted and pointed at Lew Carson like a long blue finger.

"Carson, this wagon is rolling on south. You have your choice. Give me your word not to try to escape or to interfere with my plans, else I'll have to tie you. Whichever, I can't leave you here. You and Miss Pelham will have to go on with me as far as the Border. Which is it?" he asked.

"Do you think I'd accept parole from you? You'd better tie me tight. Your ropes had better hold me, Ames."

For a girl from Boston, Miss Margo Pelham had gone through quite a lot. She made a little whimpering sound. Then she began sobbing. She was still sobbing when Ames, wanting nothing more than to get away from there, growled, "That hobbles yo' dewclaws, Carson. You better come along with me to see what's keepin' Chappo and them mules."

Lew hesitated, watching Margo, feeling lower than a dog. Then a gleam came in his eye.

The moon was waning. Yonder in the darkness—anything might happen.

Lew's revolver still lay in the edge of the building's shadow, and right now he would have given a year of his life to have his hands free, to feel the weight of that gun in his fist. He said, gruffly, "Buck up, Margo. This will work out."

They went through a thicket of switch mesquite, Lew in the lead with his arms pulled back stiffly by the rope that bound his wrists. They went toward a shallow creek, bordered by pecans and live oaks, interlaced with thorny vines. Everything seemed peaceful. To Pete Ames, evidently, everything seemed too peaceful. Somewhere ahead a mule stomped, a rabbit or a squirrel went scurrying through the brush, and there was no other sound until Ames called, softly, "Chappo. Chappo."

SHADOWS from the shadowy brush, they came from both sides. Lew Carson was lucky. The waiting men let him walk past them, and when he heard the rustle and crack of brush as the trap was sprung, he simply lowered his head and ran on toward the creek. Behind him two swift gunshots, and that must have been Pete Ames. Then another shot that surely never came from Ames' gun, for it cut the brush right over Lew's head. He heard grunting and cursing and thudding sounds back there, above the racket his pounding boots were making; guessed Ames must be giving the sons quite a battle. Guessed Ames would have to go it on his own, the shabby sonuvagun, because Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew sure as hell wasn't going to stop!

Lew went splashing across the shallow creek, cut to his left and went charging through the brush like a blind longhorn bull, blundering in the darkness into thorny vines that slashed his skin, into thorny bushes that ripped his clothes. Again he was lucky. If the tree had been a bigger one, it would have bashed his brains out. His forehead smacked against a horizontal limb. A million bright stars spun through his head. Blackness closed on him, more intense than the blackness of this Texas jungle.

How long he lay there, dazed, Lew Carson never knew. His senses came back to him slowly. He heard the murmur of the creek, near by. He got up, staggered in that direction, tripped over his own feet and fell. The whole night's sorry business was coming back to him. His one thought was for Margo. He had to find her! But first, some way, he had to work his hands free.

Flat on his belly, he lifted his head and saw dark-shining water, not two yards from his nose. He flopped over, braced his feet against the slope of the muddy bank, shoved, twisted, shoved, until water closed around his bound wrists. His shoulder, arm and leg, the whole left side of him took a dipping, along with his hands, and he could feel the chill clear to his bones. He didn't care. He lay on his back, soaking his wrists and the rope that bound them, while fear for Margo laced through him, driving all mercy from his soul.

Pete Ames, he told himself, was responsible for this. For all of it. Pete Ames and his traitor's heart and his contraband guns.

Perhaps an hour later, Lew splashed back across the creek, rubbing his numbed wrists, his tingling hands, as he moved along. Thorns had torn his flesh, the rock-hard fists of Pete Ames had battered him, that tree limb he had slammed into had all but cracked his skull. He looked almost as bad, he guessed, as that teamster up in the Panhandle that the Comanches had played with. For the first time in his life he felt whipped. He felt as hopeless and dismal as the gray dawn breaking around him.

The wagon. The guns. Margo. Without a doubt, those men had her. Probably were miles from here, heading for Old Mexico. He had no weapon, no horse.

Stumbling along, head down, Lew at first didn't believe his eyes. He had started back through the thicket, half expecting to find the lifeless body of Pete Ames. Instead, he stopped, frozen, afraid that what he saw was only a hallucination of his fevered mind.

Blued steel. Black handle. To Lew Carson, in that moment, the most precious object ever fashioned by the hand of man. A six-shooter! By the grace of God and Samuel Colt, a .44!

It looked like one of Chappo Galvan's. No doubt he had run into trouble, as Ames had, the gun jarring from its holster. Lew reached for it with both hands. And then a strange thing happened, something that only an old campaigner, a soldier, a fighting man could understand. For when Lew's finger tips touched the gun's cold steel, a new confidence flowed through him. It was as if some of the hardness of the blued gun steel entered his soul.

He stood for perhaps half a minute, the gun in his hand, gazing southward. In that direction, he told himself, he would find Margo, and maybe Pete Ames. He might have to cross into Mexico, but he would find them. If Pete Ames still lived, he was going to wish he had never been born.

Lew went on through the thicket. He

reached the edge of it, a short stone's throw from the old ranch house. Again, as when he sighted the six-shooter, he could hardly believe his eyes. The wagon was still there! The mules were hitched to it. It was ready to pull out.

Lew crouched in the thicket, his heart pounding, watching the scene before him. Seven Border ruffians, booted spurred, heavily armed, around an open fire. Saddled horses, his black with them, tied to the mesquite poles of the corral. Yonder past the fire, propped against the ranch house wall, Chappo Galvan and Pete Ames, so battered and bloody they were hardly recognizable . . . . But where was Carmalita?

Where was Margo?

DAWN'S GRAY seemed to lift suddenly, as a fog lifts. The sky to eastward blushed red, almost the red of blood, bringing new life to the thorny land, to the men around the camp fire. It was this light, Lew realized, that they had been waiting for. And something like panic gripped him. They were fixing to head south. What had he better do? Six slugs in the gun in his fist; seven men. He was a fair hand with a revolver. Surprise would be on his side . . . . But he'd be bound to lose . . . .

A slender gamecock of a fellow with pointed *bigotes*, enormous spurs and sombrero, and short jacket heavy with braid, spoke a sharp order in Spanish. Lew was close enough to see the white line of a scar across the coffee-brown face. Pasquel Rico! The same devil's son who had tried to kidnap Margo, at the Medina. Half Indian, half Spanish, it was said. Don Pasquel Rico, a vain and strutting guerilla chieftain, with black murder in his heart.

In response to Don Pasquel's order, two men went inside the ranch house They emerged shortly, and Lew began trembling. Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson, pride of the Black Horse Troop, his hands shaking like leaves in the wind. Holding himself back with an effort that made sweat pop out all over him. For he had to skulk in the brush while every nerve in him screamed for action, and watch those men drag Carmalita and Margo from the ranch house.

Other men brought up horses. Don Pasquel Rico looked on and smiled. Strangely enough, it was Margo who struggled. She tried to break away from the two Mexicans who were lifting her to a saddle. One of them slapped her viciously. Afterward, she sat in the saddle, head down, her shoulders shaking.

Lew couldn't understand it. It was as if all the fire had died in Carmalita. She spoke in a low tone, and after a moment's hesitation the men who held her arms stepped back. With no hand upon her, she swung into the saddle. Then she reined the horse around. She stared at Chappo Galvan and Pete Ames, and Lew could see her bosom heaving. Her beautiful satin-smooth face lost its wooden look, crumpling and twisting into a mask of anguish.

"Chappo—Pete," she said. "The two men I love . . . ."

Something here caused Don Pasquel Rico to scowl. His voice twanging viciously, he rapped out another order. A flurry of movement, then. Men flinging into saddle. A fellow wrinkled as a prune scrambling up to the wagon seat, agile as any monkey. Crack of the braided whip, and the wagon lurched into motion.

Lew's gallant black and a leggy sorrel, tied by lead ropes to the rear axle, followed the wagon. Margo and Carmalita followed it, and four of the renegades followed it, all of them in high good humor, their horses pressed close around the two *gringo* girls.

Margo never looked back. Carmalita turned in the saddle for a last look at Chappo and Pete Ames, and Lew knew that he would never forget the tortured, anguished expression on her face. Lew watched them until the brush closed around the little cavalcade. And he knew now why Margo had been the one to put up a struggle, why Carmalita had acted as if her very spirit were dead.

Miss Margo Pelham, from Boston, born to all the easy things. Lew admired her for the gallant fighter she was. She was his kind. She would make a wonderful wife for a soldier. She was the only girl

he knew, back home, who would have come alone to this wild, sometimes barbaric land to be with the man she loved, the man Lew hoped she loved. A bit ago she had shown no sign of fear, though certainly she was afraid, and Lew loved her for that courage. But Margo simply had not understood. Raw brutality, murder, was something that never before had touched her life.

Carmalita, though, knew with a fatalistic certainty what was going to happen, why Pasquel Rico and the fellow yonder with him had lingered behind. "Chappo—Pete"—those choked words had been her goodbye. What Chappo Galvan meant to her, Lew did not know. But she loved Pete Ames. She would have fought for Pete Ames with every drop of blood in her. She must be straining her ears now, dreading to hear the gunshots. She must be planning for tomorrow. Husky words of passion, her lips against the ear of Don Pasquel. The keen point of a dagger, warm as a kiss, slipping between his ribs . . . .

DON PASQUEL RICO stood hands on hips, taunting Chappo, taunting Pete Ames. His voice came clearly to Lew Carson.

"So now I pay you back, Senor Moggie Ames. You kill my brother and now I pay you back. For you, Chappo—poof!—one lead slog no more beeg than your thomb. For you, Moggie, my frien'—should I take time to hang you? The lead slog is to fast. More better, I think, to drag you with the rope, behin' the horse. You don' have any scare? You don' shake in your boots?"

Lew was working his way around the brush-grown clearing, keeping to the cover of the heavier mesquite. Maggie Ames, he kept telling himself, Pete Ames. What did he care what happened to Pete Ames? Pete Ames was worse than a renegade. He was a traitor, a man who would sell out his own people, his own land, for a handful of yellow gold.

He heard Pete Ames, with contempt in his voice, say, "You miserable, struttin' bandy-legged son! You've got my gun. You've got everything on yo' side. Cut yo' dogs loose."

But the mixed blood in Don Pasquel wanted Ames to beg. The cruel blood in him snarled, "The mother of you, she was not so brave. Bah! *Maldito pelon!* On the knees she cried for the life of her son, who was brother to you. This old Bodie, he cried *tambien.* Before you die, I bet you my boots—"

From the looks of him, Pete Ames was half dead. He had no gun. He had no chance. He put his hands flat on the ground, seemed to gather himself. The tone of his voice, something about him, sent a tingle along Lew's spine.

"So my mother begged for Kenny's life. For the life of my kid brother, who hadn't turned sixteen. Rico, if there is a God in heaven, He'll grant me one favor. He'll let me live to settle with you."

Traitor? No doubt. But a brave man—as brave a man as Lew had ever known. And because Lew Carson was what he was, a queer pride rose up in him, thrilling him and filling him with something like glory. For, in a way, he and Pete Ames were brothers.

So it came down to this: Fate or the gods of violence or the black heart of Pasquel Rico had split Rico's forces. While Rico was having his fun with Pete Ames, Lew could grab a horse. He could follow the wagon, Carmalita and Margo. He could leave Pete Ames here, to die.

Don Pasquel Rico eased his right-hand gun from its holster. Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew Carson crouched in the brush, undecided.

VIII

PETE AMES WATCHED THE gamecock figure before him. This was the man who had killed his father, his mother, his kid brother. The gun in Rico's hand lifted, and it all seemed unreal to Ames. He was a fighting man. It didn't seem possible that his string had played out.

He thought of Margo, raised to all the good things, but with a stubborn steel in her that made her risk more than life

for Texas and the Union, for what she thought was right. And because he knew the kind of men Rico's men were, pain cut through Pete Ames, sharp as any knife.

He thought of Carmalita, and all the fire in her; and because she had never known any of the good things, because he knew now that, for him, she was the one, a great sadness grew in his heart.

And then, above all these personal thoughts, these intimate longings, a vision of old Sam, solid, craggy as a rock, came in Pete Ames' mind. For Texas and the Union—for Sam Houston . . . . Ames from where he sat, with his back against the wall of the ranch house his father had built, could see the blue sheen of the revolver that belonged to Lew Carson. It was not a man's length from Ame's hand, half hidden by a drift of leaves—and that distance was all the distance between death and a lifetime. Ames gathered all his forces, watching Don Pasquel Rico lift his gun; and he knew that he would make one final play—for Texas and for the Union—and that he would lose.

The gun pointed at Ames. Pasquel Rico sighed, mockingly, *"Ai de mi,* if I have more time—"

And then there was Lew Carson, Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew, stepping forward, a walking dead man with a gun in his fist, all the best families of Boston behind him, his blue eyes blazing, speaking in the softest of voices—the blued six-shooter rock-steady in his fist.

"Hate to interrupt, Rico. Would you mind turning this way? Hate to shoot you in the back . . . ."

Then Don Pasquel Rico, whirling, snarling his surprise . . . . It was unfortunate to Lew's way of thinking, perhaps, that the man with Rico was right in the line of fire. Lew shot from his hip. Don Pasquel's man grabbed at his belly and made ugly gagging sounds.

Pete Ames knew one moment of wonderment. Why would Lew Carson take this chance for him? Ames knew guns, knew the men who used them; the chance Lew was taking was very clear to Pete Ames. But why? For some reason Ames could not understand, Lew Carson was risking his life for him. Risking his life for a man he had every reason to hate.

These thoughts flashed through Ames' mind. He did not wait to analyze them. He simply lunged toward the revolver, hours ago knocked from the hand of Lew Carson. He came up with the gun's weight a substantial and comforting thing. He said, "Rico! See who begs now, Rico."

Rico stared, a man petrified, a man turned to stone. Then he cried, "No, Ames! No!" And there was that watch-tick of time when Lew Carson held his fire, knowing that this moment, altogether belonged to Pete Ames. Ames' gun exploded. It made a sullen, definite sound. Before Rico fell, the waxed points of his mustache seemed to turn upward, expressing his vast surprise.

Ames stared at Lew Carson! Lew stared back at him. Ames spoke gruffly.

"Soldier, I'm much obliged."

"The hell with you, Ames. I did this because I had to, because you're an American. I wouldn't pour water on you, if your guts were on fire."

Ames' lips formed their thin, sardonic line. He said, "You won't have time for any water pourin', Carson. But you better stoke that gun with some more bullets. I hear Rico's *hombres* comin' at a high lope, to see about all the gunfire."

And then Lew shouted, "O'Hare! You brass-bound mother's son!"

Sergeant O'Hare, of the Cavalry, stepped down from a horse that stood with flanks quivering, head down. Sergeant O'Hare saluted smartly.

"And beggin' the lieutenant's pardon. sir, if the lieutenant can go against the Old—against Colonel Clendennin's orders, Sergeant O'Hare begs the same privilege. I put Corporal Vastine in charge of the wagon-train detail."

Pete Ames paid scant attention to this. Pete Ames was staring at the huge, red-faced fellow who had arrived with O'Hare. Pete Ames said, "Mike! Mike McMaloney! I left you a long piece north of here. What in the name—?"

Sergeant Mike McMaloney, of the Texas Rangers, grinned sheepishly.

"Condemn it, Moggie, it was this-a-way. Me and Jim and Reese talked 'er over

after we left you. We all agreed that, mebbyso, in case there was trouble—just so's I could make a proper report to Cap'n Cloud—why, mebbyso I'd better mosey after you. I run into this—this yaller-striped sojer feller, we heard the shootin', an'—"

"Damn yo' buttons," was all Ames could think of to say, softly. "Damn yo' Irish buttons."

The hoofbeats of Rico's men were close now. "Deploy!" Lew Carson yelled. Pete Ames yelled, "Hunt cover!"

And so it was that the men of Don Pasquel Rico ran into a warm reception. Then they broke, and the two of them still able to run, ran the other way.

SO RATTLED were those bold men that they spurred right past the wagon, and Carmalita, who was driving the wagon, cried, "Ron, you robbits!"

Miss Margo Pelham scrambled down from the wagon seat and headed for Lew Carson. No doubt of it now; she loved the man. Once satisfied that he wasn't going to die just yet, she put her face against his chest and sobbed. Above these sounds the voice of Chappo Galvan spoke sharply.

"Up with the hands, Lieutenant Carson! Now, we turn this wagon for Old Mexico!"

Chappo was on one knee beside the still form of Don Pasquel Rico. He had one of Don Pasquel's guns in his fist. In the early morning light his blank eyes looked purposeful and wicked.

Sergeant O'Hare who had just reloaded and sheathed his revolver, growled, "So 'tis more to it!" His big hand closed around the gun's handle. But Pete Ames was ahead of him. Pete Ames, with that old magic that had made his name almost a legend, flipped his weapon clear of leather and spoke gently.

"No, Sergeant. No . . . ."

In the eyes of Mike McMaloney, watching all this, little imps of devilment began to dance. He stepped over and stood with his shoulder almost touching Pete Ames.

"Don't say it, Moggie! I done gone this far. I ain't backin' down now. You stood by me too many times."

Pete Ames tasted, then, one sweet moment of triumph. That old score with Rico was settled. He had marked it off the books. And now there was a chance that he could take the wagon on through. For Texas, and the Union. For Sam Houston . . . .

Then Ames heard the smart slogging of hoofs. He saw the grin that grew slowly on Lew Carson's battered face. He turned and saw, riding two abreast, a column of blue-clad troopers.

"Mulavey's troop, on patrol from Ringgold. Just one of those things, Ames," Lew Carson murmured. "It looks like you lose."

"No!"

And that was Carmalita, crying with her whole heart. And Chappo Galvan's lips skinned back from his teeth, his gun lifted and steadied on Lew Carson, and desperation was written on his face.

"You are my prisoner, Lieutenant Carson. I hold you for a hostage. The life of you or the guns. We take you *and* the guns,"

"Drop it, Chappo," Ames said, his voice infinitely weary. "We can't fight the whole Cavalry. We have lost."

It turned out, though, that Mulavey's troop was engaged in more than a routine patrol. It turned out that Mulavey and his men were riding in the van of quite a notable procession. When Pete Ames first became aware of that fact, he was standing stiffly erect, listening to the grim words of Lew Carson.

"Pete Ames, in the name of the United States of America, it is my duty to place you under arrest."

For gun-running, Ames thought dully. For an act against Texas and against the United States. It meant at least a long term in prison. It meant that his life had turned to ashes. But above all else it meant that he had failed. He had failed the land he loved. He had failed Sam Houston.

The spring buggy was driven by a Negro lad whose teeth gleamed white as sun-glanced snow. In the cordon of Rangers who surrounded the buggy Ames recognized, with a vast amazement Jim Allers, Reese Lockerby, other stout Texas sons

he had ridden the Border *senderos* with. And in the back seat of the buggy, Captain Cloud of the Rangers, Colonel Clendennin with his gray mustache—and a huge fellow with gray hair and with eyes that held the fierce look of eagles. Old Sam Houston with his dander up, scenting the battle smoke and spoiling for a fight!

That resonant, powerful, unforgettable voice: "Lieutenant! You young whippersnapper, what's going on here?"

"We've caught some gun-runners, sir" Lew stammered. "That wagon, there, is loaded with guns and powder and ammunition. Contraband goods bound for Mexico."

"You are mistaken, Lieutenant. Those guns were consigned to Peter Ames, Texas Ranger on leave, an agent of the State of Texas. Those guns belong to the State of Texas—no matter how Texas got them!"

And Sam Houston, that lion of a man, whirled on Colonel Clendennin and his fine eyes shot fire.

"Colonel, yo' Cavalry cannot arrest this man. It cannot arrest Carlos Rodriquez de Santoya y Galvan. It cannot arrest Carmalita, there, nor touch a hair of her lovely head. For those three patriots work for Texas and for me. I had a plan, Colonel Clendennin, which I outlined briefly to you. Pete Ames, Carmalita and Chappo risked more than life to help me carry that plan through. But they shall not suffer. If I have any influence within this State or outside of it, they shall not suffer. I suggest, Colonel, that we step aside, that we talk it over."

COLONEL CLENDENNIN was a man not without ambition. Sam Houston, he was well aware, still wielded influence in Washington. Reluctantly, he nodded. "Perhaps we'd better talk it over."

So the two big fellows stepped aside, conferred earnestly. Margo came to stand before Pete Ames, and there was both sadness and pleading in her eyes.

She said, "I should have known, Pete Ames. A man who loves Texas the way you do—Pete, can you ever forgive me? Pete—" Her voice broke and she turned away. Lew Carson was waiting.

Pete Ames paid no attention to any of this. He was watching Carmalita, whose grandpap had fought beside old Bodie, at San Jacinto—Carmalita, standing there beside her brother, Chappo, with her whole soul in her eyes.

Pete Ames said, "Carmalita, a man like me some day—" He could not finish, but a great happiness surged up inside him, mingling with the sadness that was there.

She said, "A girl like me, Pete Ames—I'll wait."

Later, at Sam Houston's order, they set fire to the wagon. They stood well away from it, the cavalrymen, the two girls, the Rangers, Sam Houston and Pete Ames. There in the lonesome mesquite, it made a fine sight, a display for the Fourth of July. Pine and canvas blazed merrily. Ammunition popped like giant firecrackers. Gunpowder exploded with a zooming rush of sound.

Old Sam Houston watched his grand, daring plan go up in fire and smoke, and tears came into his eyes, tears coursed down his seamy cheeks.

Captain Cloud was watching Ames. He said, "Your job is waiting for you with my Ranger outfit. It has been all the time, waiting until you finished this—special duty."

Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew spoke up then. He said, "It seems, Ames that the Old—that Colonel Clendennin, in view of the circumstances, is not going to take any disciplinary action against me. Perhaps we'll meet again, on a bigger battle field."

"Maybe," Pete Ames said. "But look out for yo's'f. Because it looks like we'll still be scrappin' each other."

Moggie Ames and Hair-Like-the-Sun Lew. They didn't grin. They didn't even smile. But suddenly each one of them reached, and their hands met in a grip surprisingly warm.

"Stay out of my way, Ames. I'll be looking for you down my gun sights."

"Keep yo' eye peeled, Carson. You're a right smart hand—but you won't never get but one shot."

Copley reached the head of the stairs in time to see Redfield draw a long-barrelled Colt.

The Stage To Cheyenne

By EMMETT McDOWELL

Easy pickin's for a gun-sharp road agent was that slow-moving stage from Deadwood—loaded with big-strike treasure and a beautiful prairie belle!

THE INSIDE OF A COW'S third stomach couldn't be no inkier than the Cheyenne and Black Hills stage, Copley thought. He was riding backwards on the front seat, a small leather satchel between his ankles. There was seventeen thousand dollars for the Deadwood bank in that satchel, and Copley's nerves were strung tight as fiddle strings.

Clouds hid the stars but an occasional

flicker of sheet lightning revealed pine woods and rock pinnacles towering above them. They were bouncing, swaying, jerking. Copley's ears sorted the squeaking, rumbling noises.

The coach hit bottom and the wheels slammed against the ruts with a bone shaking jar. The man on his left pitched against him, swore under his breath.

Then the stage began to climb again. The six horse team slowed to a walk.

There was a girl seated opposite Copley, their knees almost touching. He could hear her dress rustle as she leaned forward.

"Mr. Copley, are you awake?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said self consciously. He was acutely, uncomfortably aware of her presence there in the dark. He knew her—had known her for a couple of years now. Her and her brother both.

She was Faith Emory, a singer at the Melodeon in Deadwood. He didn't know what her brother did. "Mis'" Bill, they called him, short for "Mississippi" Bill. He'd been a river pilot before the liquor got him.

Copley remembered him as a soft, easy-spoken fellow, but when Mis' Bill got a skin full of whiskey he thought he could lick the whole Cherokee Nation. Copley had thrown him in the lockup one night at Cheyenne. That's how he'd come to know Faith. She'd bailed her brother out.

She was a pretty thing—always made him feel uncouth as a wild Indian. He and women just didn't mix. Sorta like oil and water, he thought wryly.

He heard Faith say: "You weren't joshing me, Mr. Copley. You've sure enough taken a job as a drummer?"

"Yes ma'am. Hardware."

She gave an amused little chuckle in the dark. "*You* a drummer!"

"What's wrong with that, ma'am?" he demanded uncomfortably.

"But you were a deputy town marshal at Cheyenne. I should think—"

"There's no future to that kind of work," Copley replied, feeling more and more embarrassed.

Sheet lightning flickered again, and he caught a fragmentary glimpse of the other passengers, their wan frightened faces like tired masks. The girl's eyes were enormous. She was staring straight at him.

"Isn't this about where Johnny Slaughter was killed?"

"No, ma'am," Copley said shortly and didn't go on.

The man next to Faith said, "That's up the road a piece yet, miss. They got Slaughter within two miles of camp. But that was the only time the road agents ever jumped a stage so close. 'Taint likely they'll try it again."

"No-o-o," murmured the girl doubtfully, "but we're carrying currency. Aren't we, Mr. Copley?"

Copley went rigid. How the devil had the girl learned that? The time of shipment, even the fact that there was going to be such a shipment had been a closely guarded secret. The treasure box was empty. Copley doubted if even the messenger knew about the money that he was carrying in the satchel between his ankles.

"Why, as to that, Miss Faith," he said, jolted out of his taciturnity; "I wouldn't know."

The girl was silent.

Copley wondered if it had only been a lucky guess on her part, or if there actually had been another leak.

There was a leak at the Deadwood end, he knew. As special agent for Wells Fargo, he was being sent in to plug it. But that someone at the Cheyenne office was selling them out—he just couldn't believe it.

His eyes narrowed in the dark. What had Faith been doing in Cheyenne anyway?

"Oh, Lord!" he thought. "Not her."

Seth Redfield, the Wells Fargo undercover man in Deadwood, had hinted that the tip-off might be a girl. Copley began to feel that baffled suffocating sensation that always possessed him when he had to go up against a woman.

They terrified him. He was no match for them, and he knew it.

Sweet beguiling faces concealing the cunning of an Apache. There wasn't a man alive that was the match of a shrewd woman!

HE HEARD the driver utter a startled curse. Something thumped on the roof. The coach came to a stop.

"Road agents!" somebody whispered.

"No," said the man beside Faith; "probably a boulder's rolled down into the road." He stuck his head out the window. "What's the trouble, Ike?"

Copley could hear the driver and the messenger muttering together, then the driver called: "Nothin' t'git in an uproar about. There's a lantern in the road ahead."

He yelled at the horses, cracked his whip. The coach began to move again.

Copley slid his revolver from its sheath, twisted his head out the window. He could see a yellow point of light in front of them that resolved itself into a smoking lantern set atop a flat stone.

They were almost up to it when a figure stepped out of the shadows into the middle of the road and held up his hand.

Copley rested the barrel of his revolver on the edge of the window sill, drew a bead on the man's stomach.

The fellow had the learn wiry build of a rider. His hickory trousers were stuffed into high heeled boots. The collar of his leather coat was turned up and his face was only a black shadow beneath the wide drooping brim of his hat.

"What's up?" the driver demanded.

He sounded edgy, as if half-inclined to run him down.

"There's a tree acrost the road," the man answered. "It's around the bend. We was afeard you'd pile into it in the dark."

Copley heard the girl gasp. The driver swore.

At that instant a streak of orange flame belched from the darkness alongside the road. The roar of a shotgun half deafened them, caught them totally by surprise!

The horses reared and snorted. The figure in front of the lantern leaped for the heads of the plunging leaders. He was out of Copley's range of vision. The messenger's gun clattered down from the box into the dirt.

The driver said: "Gawd a' mighty!"

"Take it easy," the man called in a brittle voice. He was having trouble holding the horses. "You're covered from both sides of the trail. Driver, I'll trouble you to thrown down that express box."

There was an angry grunt from overhead. Metal scraped on wood. The empty treasure box hit the road with a crash.

Copley's mouth felt dry. He licked his lips. The leather satchel between his feet was scorching him.

Something began to drip-drip from the top of the window.

The road agent released the horses, stepped quickly back out of the lantern light.

"Drive on!"

There was the crack of the whip as the driver swung the team expertly around the light.

"Hi!" he yelled, "Hi!"

The horses lunged ahead. The coach jerked, every joint protesting. Swaying on its fore and aft braces, it went careening off into the velvet blackness.

The passengers were jostled helter-skelter. Copley put up his gun. He was aware of relief, but there was no feeling of elation as he stuck his head out the window, shouted: "How bad's the messenger?"

"Half his chest blowed away," the driver's voice came floating back on a string of curses.

"It's that Texas outfit, I'll bet a horse," somebody said.

Lightning flickered again. Copley's eyes were on the girl.

She'd let her guard down under cover of the darkness. Her lips were pale with shock. Her lashes glistened. He could see the tear streaks on her face. Then the light was gone.

It was only a momentary impression, but it left Copley shaken and wondering.

CAL COPLEY alighted in Deadwood, paused on the boardwalk, peering over the heads of the crowd that had gathered like flies about carrion.

Mis' Bill was there to meet Faith—a slender, pleasant faced man in a red flannel shirt and bedraggled hickory trousers. With Faith's luggage in his hands, he shook his head at Copley, said, "Bad business. Bad business."

Faith told Copley goodbye, tugged at

Mis' Bill's arm to hurry him up. She seemed uncommonly anxious to be off.

The little black satchel pulled at Copley's fingers. His orders had been to deliver the currency straight to the Deadwood bank. He wasn't to go near the Wells Fargo office, since it was important that his connection with the express company remain a secret.

The bank wouldn't be open though at this time of night. Copley swore under his breath.

Just then he discovered Redfield's long, sallow face among the crowd. He picked up his carpet bag in his other hand, shouldered his way towards the gambler.

Redfield gave no sign of recognition, but as Copley came abreast of him, his eyes flicked to the little black satchel.

"They didn't get the money?" he said, low voiced and without shifting his glance from the melee about the stage.

"No," Copley grunted.

"Good work. The bank's closed. Take a room at the Overland. You can put it in the hotel safe. I'll be along in a few minutes. We'd better not be seen talking together. I think they're on to me."

Copley felt his stomach tighten. Without answering he started along the boardwalk toward the Overland, walking with short, choppy steps of a man who has grown up forking a horse.

Strains of music blared from the open doors of honky tonks. Mud-grimed miners, ex-cowhands, painted girls from the cribs and dancehalls rubbed shoulders on Deadwood's mile-and-a-half long thorofare. The boom town in the Black Hills was busting its seams.

He passed the open door of the Melodeon. The tinkling of a piano came out to him but the place had been drained of customers by the news of the hold-up.

The road agents were going to be sore as boils, he thought, when they broke open the empty treasure box. It was possible for them to have ridden into camp ahead of the stage. They may even have been in that crowd about the coach watching him get down with the satchel in his hand . . .

The black mouth of an alley gaped at him just beyond the rough log building that housed the Melodeon. He crossed it, feeling his scalp tighten. He wasn't three steps past it when he heard a sound behind him.

Copley dropped the carpet bag, started to whirl around, reaching for his revolver.

Somebody grabbed his collar, yanked his coat down over his arms, pinning them to his side like a straight jacket. He opened his mouth to yell. The heavy barrel of a revolver caught him behind the ear.

The boardwalk blew up in his face. He had an instant impression of being hauled back into the deeper blackness of the alley's mouth.

Then—nothing.

COPLEY became aware of an intolerable ache. His skull felt as if it had burst open like a ripe watermelon.

Dimly he was conscious of the tinkling of a piano. Something cool and wet touched his forehead.

A girl's voice pleaded: "Mr. Copley! Speak to me, Mr. Copley!"

He opened his eyes to find himself sprawled on his back against the bottom log of a building. Across the alley a door was open into the Melodeon, cutting a yellow rectangle in the blackness. Light spilled out of the doorway, fell across him and the figure of a girl kneeling beside him.

Faith Emory! She was cradling his head against her breast. He was enveloped in the faint smell of lavender.

He felt suddenly hot, and struggled to a sitting posture, leaned his back against the rough logs.

Faith drew in her breath.

"You—you shouldn't move. What happened?"

"Satchel. Did you see it? Black leather?"

"Is this it?" She hauled his carpet bag into the light.

Copley shook his head and regretted it instantly.

"No. Black leather, small."

"I didn't see it," Faith said. "Wait a minute; I'll fetch a light."

She gathered her voluminous skirt in her hand and disappeared through the

door to the Melodeon. For a moment she was silhouetted against the light, a trim, slender figure, the bustle making her waist look tiny by comparison. Then she was gone.

Copley searched his pockets for a match, found one and struck it. The lucifer popped like a firecracker as it burst into flame.

The alley was paved with mud. There was mud on his brown trousers which he wore outside his boots, on his coat and hands, and his hat was gone.

The flame died. He struck another. He found his revolver, a Smith and Wesson .32 caliber, lying in the mud, but there was no sign of the black satchel.

He hadn't expected to find it.

Damn! he thought, what was Joe Bowen going to say to this? Joe Bowen was chief of the Wells Fargo officers—an outspoken, hard faced man who had no patience with failure.

Copley was new. In a way he was still on trial. He scowled at the blackness, trying to marshall his thoughts.

Faith reappeared in the doorway with an oil lamp in her hand.

"Here," she said; "drink this," and held out a water tumbler half full of whiskey.

Their hands touched as he returned the glass. Copley's cheeks warmed at the contact, and he turned away quickly, began to examine the mud by the light of the kerosene lamp. The dirt underfoot was trampled beyond any hope of recognizing individual tracks.

"What time is it?" he muttered.

"After two in the morning."

He'd been lying here in this alley behind the Melodeon over two hours. he realized with a start. What had become of Redfield?

"What happened?" Faith asked. "I stepped out for a breath of air after my number. The light from the open door fell across you lying there." She shivered. "I thought you were dead."

"Somebody hit me with a pistol barrel. I didn't get a look at him."

"Did they take anything?"

He touched his waist, found his money belt still in place. It held almost a thousand dollars. The discovery did more than anything to convince Copley that the same men who had held up the stage had waylaid him. They knew exactly what they were after, and they didn't fool with anything else.

"No," he said, "only the satchel. It had some samples in it. Don't reckon it's valuable to anybody but me."

She said: "What are you going to do now?"

"Go to the hotel, I reckon."

"You can't go like that. Come in here."

She took his arm, pulled him through the back door of the Melodeon. Copley found himself in a room beneath the stage. He could hear laughter, and shouts. The piano was louder. Someone was prancing back and forth on the boards overhead.

IN THE LIGHT of the kerosene lamp, he was a square-built young man with a muddy thatch of brown hair, pale blue eyes as guileless as a child's. His jaw was square, his mouth wide and thin.

Faith returned with a white porcelain bowl of water, a towel and a bottle of whisky. She touched the matted hair above the ear.

"It's swollen," she said, "and the skin's split a little but I don't suppose you'll die of it."

She bathed away the mud, doused the wound with whisky. It had a clean sharp bite and a clean sharp smell. Copley began to feel better.

"You'd better wash your face and brush some of that mud off," Faith said in a sober voice. Then almost as if she couldn't resist it, she ran her fingers through his tousled, muddy hair. "And get out of here!"

Copley gave her a startled look. Faith's hair was black as a crow's wing. It made a startling contrast against her clear gray eyes. The skin of her shoulders and upper breasts, rose from the blue damask sheath of her gown like a flower.

Anybody that pretty couldn't be up to no good! She'd been in the stagecoach. She could have put two and two together and figured that he was carrying the money in the satchel. He'd been waylaid behind the Melodeon . . .

Copley began to feel as if he had swal-

lowed a bad egg.

"Say," he said; "where's Mis' Bill?"

Faith's gray eyes widened.

"Out—out at the diggings, I suppose. He and Tom Pickett are working a claim up Gold Run. They sleep there. Why did you ask?"

"Why don't he take you out of here? This ain't a fit place for a woman to be found dead in. If I had a sister—"

"He is!"

"He's what?"

She said earnestly, "They've struck it rich. Oh nothing like the homestake, but Bill's done well. He's selling his share to Pickett and we're going to buy a cafe near the railroad shops in Cheyenne."

Copley wished that he could believe her, but she was a sight too pretty for a hash slinger to his way of thinking.

He rose, swayed, put his hand against the log wall to steady himself.

Somebody said, "Who's that jasper there?" in a harsh voice.

Copley lifted his eyes, saw a short, dried-up man with a luxuorious brown moustache. His ill-fitting Prince Albert was filthy and wrinkled. Dirt was ground into his skin giving him a gray look. He stood just inside the entrance to the dance hall proper, scowling at Faith.

She said, "He's a friend of mine, Dave. What do you want?"

This must be Dave Lusk, owner of the Melodeon, Copley guessed. He studied the man curiously. Lusk had the reputation of being afraid of nothing except soap and water.

"Why ain't you out there rustling them boxes like I told you?" he demanded.

Faith's head went up.

"I sing here. That's the extent of my duties."

"You can sing for your wages, then," Lusk told her viciously, turned on his heel, and went back into the dance hall.

Faith looked furious.

"Why do you work for him?" Copley asked.

She let her shoulders droop. "A girl has to eat the same as anybody else."

"But I thought Bill had struck it rich."

"He has," she said defensively. "I—I—Mr. Copley, you're a Wells Fargo detective, aren't you?"

Copley couldn't have been any more surprised if she had slapped him in the face. He reddened angrily. That was a woman for you. See through a man like he was glass.

Then it occurred to him that the road agents must know who he was anyway. Maybe it was Faith who'd told them.

"Will you walk me home, Mr. Copley," she asked in a small voice. "I don't feel like working anymore tonight."

"Why—why, yes ma'am," he said, again taken by surprise, feeling vaguely like Judas Iscariot. He didn't know how she'd done it, but doggone it, she'd managed to put him completely in the wrong.

DAYLIGHT wasn't far off when Copley reached the Overland Hotel. He went straight up to Redfield's room and knocked.

Light was seeping under the door. He heard a chair thump, then Redfield's voice:

"Who is it?"

"Copley."

The door swung open revealing Redfield in his shirt sleeves, a .45 caliber frontier model Colt in his hand.

"Get in here," he said. "What happened to you? I've been wearing out the floor boards. Is the money in the safe?"

Copley said, "No. Somebody laid me out with a pistol barrel and lifted the satchel."

The harrassed, worried expression faded from Redfield's long, horse-like countenance, leaving it blank, inscrutable. It was the practiced mask of the professional gambler giving no hint of the thoughts going on behind it.

He thrust the Colt in his waistband, sat down on the iron bed, stared at Copley without any expression whatever.

"That's bad. How did it happen?"

Copley sank onto the rickety chair. The room was lit by a kerosene lamp with a tin reflector. A marble top washstand held an earthenware bowl and pitcher with a towel above it. Floor and walls were bare.

He said: "They jumped me from behind. I come to in the alley back of the Melodeon. I didn't get a look at 'em."

"Did you report it?"

"No. I figger it was the same gang that held up the stage. When they found the treasure box was empty they rode into town hell fer leather. They seen me get out with the satchel and waylaid me back of the Melodeon. The sheriff's out looking for 'em. He thinks they got the money the first time. There ain't no need to confuse him."

Redfield opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it and closed it again.

"Anybody see this?" he asked finally.

Copley stiffened. "No. A girl at the Melodeon found me, though."

"Who?"

"A singer. Faith Emory."

"Faith Emory! Damn it, Copley, have you any idea how this is going to look?"

"I don't reckon I exactly savvy what you mean," Copley said in a cold voice.

Redfield got to his feet. He was a tall man, tall and stooped, with long arms and long delicate fingers. A drooping, tawny moustache gave his face the sad expression of a Saint Bernard puppy. He strode back and forth on the rough, sawed planks.

"Don't get me wrong," he told Copley. "I was planted here by Wells-Fargo to keep my eyes and ears open. Nothing else.

"Three months ago this Faith Emory hit town. Her brother and another man had a claim up Gold Run, but they weren't panning out enough gold to keep them in tobacco. Faith went to work for Dave Lusk at the Melodeon.

"She wasn't there a week before Andy Jewett took a shine to her. Andy's the express agent here. Then the stage was held up. It was held up regular after that, but mind you, only when it was carrying gold!"

"You think Jewett's sold out?" Copley interrupted.

Redfield pulled at his moustache thoughtfully.

"Either he's in with them," he said; "or the girl's teasing the information out of him."

"What makes you so sure Faith's the tip off?"

Redfield stopped pacing, wheeled on Copley.

"Because," he said, "right after Faith showed up, the hold-ups started, and Mis' Bill and Tom Pickett struck it rich out on their claim! It's too damn pat. Miss'Bill's no miner. And Tom Pickett's a regular curly wolf. He left Montana one jump ahead of the Vigilantes."

"An' you think, maybe, I throwed in with 'em too? Copley said in a dry, hoarse voice.

The gambler stood perfectly still. His hand wasn't very far from the butt of the revolver protruding from his waist band.

"I didn't say I thought that, Cal," he said carefully. "I asked you if you had any idea how it was going to look."

"Yeh. Well, how is it going to look?"

"Not so good. You know Faith Emory pretty well. She was in Cheyenne with you, came back on the stage with you. Nobody at this end knew about the money, but the stage was held up. Only the road agents missed the cash because you were carrying it.

"You leave the stage with the money. Nobody sees you till three hours later when you turn up without it and with a story about being waylaid and robbed. And your only witness is this same Faith Emory."

Copley swore furiously.

"You know what they'll say," Redfield went on. "They'll say you and Faith planned the whole thing between you."

"If that was the case why didn't we let the road agents take it when they held up the stage?"

"You and Faith double crossed your own men. The pair of you saw a chance to grab it all without having to split it five or six ways."

"The money's marked," Copley said.

Redfield was silent. Dawn was graying the single window and Deadwood had settled into uneasy slumber. There was a late stale taste to the air in the room.

"That might make a difference," the gambler said slowly; "though if none of the marked bills show up, it's going to look worse than ever."

Copley's jaw tightened. "You've told me what everybody else will believe. What do you think?"

The gambler's eyes narrowed. He

studied Copley a long time before answering.

"I don't know," he said frankly.

CAL COPLEY slept till late afternoon. The room was thick with heat, and he woke slippery with sweat. He rolled out of bed, examined his scalp in the cracked mirror above the washstand.

It was swollen and sore to the touch. His guileless pale blue eyes were troubled.

Women! he thought. Why didn't they stay home where they belonged?

His blue eyes hardened. He'd be damned if Faith Emory was going to pull the wool over his eyes.

He washed, shaved, dressed in a snuff-brown suit that was too tight at the shoulders. He put on flat heeled boots that made him feel as if he were clumping around in snow shoes. He broke the revolver, checked the loads, thrust it into his waistband where it would be inconspicuous and left the hotel.

By the time he reached the bank, he had come to the conclusion that it was foolish to conceal his identity. The road agents knew his connection with Wells-Fargo. There was no purpose in hiding it from anyone else.

He marched inside, identified himself, reported the theft of the money. He met with cold suspicion.

Yes, they'd be on the lookout for the marked bills. If any turned up they'd report them to the sheriff's office. Though they were careful not to say so, they obviously didn't believe him.

He ran into the same reception at the sheriff's and the Wells-Fargo office.

He was inwardly seething as he made his way down the gulch to the Chinese section where he found a restaurant, ordered a steak, potatoes and coffee.

The telegram found him there, savagely attacking his food. It was from Joe Bowen, chief of Wells-Fargo officers. It stated boldly that as of that moment he was relieved from further duty. He could pick up any money owing him from Andy Jewett, the agent at the express office, and he was to turn over any information in his possession to Ed Woodruff, the Wells-Fargo officer stationed in Deadwood.

Copley felt as if someone had just kicked him in the stomach. He paid for his half-eaten meal and left the restaurant.

The only reason that he was still a free man, he realized numbly, was the fact that they had no concrete evidence to back up their suspicion.

COPLEY RETURNED to his room. He sat at the window staring down at the long line of a freighter's train jamming Deadwood's narrow street. Not only had the thieves got away with the seventeen thousand dollars, but they had managed to thoroughly discredit him in doing it. A typically feminine trick! It had all the earmarks.

Copley's lips thinned. He jumped to his feet, left the room.

Night fell swiftly in the straggling town, jammed as it was between two mountains. There was no twilight. Soft voices, the blare of orchestras, laughter and the clatter of feet came up out of the darkness to meet Copley from the boardwalk. He allowed the crowd to carry him down the gulch through splashes of light streaming from the fronts of saloons.

The tinkling of the piano greeted him at the door of the Melodeon, and a girl's voice singing "Oh, Susannah." There was a tight knot in Copley's stomach as he pushed inside.

The Melodeon combined dance hall and bar, theatre an gambling house in one rough log building. The dirt floor was covered with sawdust. On the tiny stage Faith Emory was singing.

She looked tall and slender above the kerosene footlights. There was a fixed smile on her lips, and when she finished she gathered up her skirts and ran off the stage despite the stamping and yelling of the miners.

Copley went directly to the bar. He ran his eyes over the barn-like interior, taking in the curtained boxes facing the stage, the faro layouts and poker tables—a steady uproar washed against his ears like surf.

"Looking for someone?" a girl's voice asked at his elbow.

Copley swallowed. "No ma'am," he said uncomfortably. He couldn't see Redfield anywhere.

"Buy me a drink," said the girl. He felt her slip her hand under his arm. "C'mon, honey. Don't be stingy."

Copley's cheeks grew hot. He glanced at the girl, who was a slight blonde creature with brittle blue eyes. Not even the thick application of powder and rouge could entirely conceal the hard lines about her mouth.

He put a dollar on the bar, mumbled something about helping yourself, tried to ease away.

"Don't be a ninny!" she hissed at him. "Lusk is watching us. I've got a message for you."

"Lusk?"

"Yeh. Don't look. He's standing in the stage door."

Copley flicked up his eyes, caught a glimpse of the grimy little owner of the Melodeon. The bartender set a drink on the counter, took Copley's dollar.

"Cold tea!" the blonde girl muttered. "Ugh!"

"What's the message?" Copley demanded. "Who's it from?"

"Faith. She wants to see you right away. The first box. Well, thanks for nothing." She slid away.

Copley scowled at her bare back. He glanced at the stage door, but Dave Lusk had disappeared. There was still no sign of Redfield at any of the gambling tables.

The box was just a curtained pigeonhole that looked out directly on the rough plank stage.

It was empty and Copley sat down. He could hear voices backstage through the flimsy walls, girls clattering up the steps to the rooms above. A man in his shirt sleeves strolled out to the piano, sat down, banged out a few notes.

Five girls in moth-eaten ostrich plumes and not much else pranced onto the stage, began a song and dance routine. They would rustle the boxes later, and Copley wondered which showed the wear most—the girls or their costumes.

They were in the middle of the second chorus when he heard a step behind him and swung around.

It was Redfield. The gambler slid into a chair.

"Listen close," he told Copley in a low voice; "I haven't got but a minute."

Copley said, "But I thought—"

"Yeh, I know. I told Dolly that Faith wanted to see you. I don't want anyone to know we're together."

"What's the idea?" Copley asked.

"I think you're getting a raw deal," said Redfield dryly. "I think maybe we can wind it up tonight. I was going for you at the hotel when I saw you come in here."

Copley felt his heart surge up.

"Have you heard something, Seth?"

"Yes and no." Redfield pulled at his moustache with maddening deliberation. "Andy Jewett's sending the semi-monthly clean-up out on the seven o'clock stage in the morning. He didn't make up his mind until late this afternoon. Woodruff's going to ride messenger. Nobody but the three of us know."

"Yes," Copley said impatiently. "Yes go on."

"I was keeping an eye out for Jewett tonight," Redfield went on. "Sure enough I saw him come in about an hour ago. He went into one of the boxes. Pretty soon Faith slipped in after him.

"Faith doesn't rustle the boxes. Dave Lusk has done everything he could to make her, because that's where the profits are. She says her voice is for sale, but she isn't. Lusk can froth his head off but she won't go near them.

"Soon as I saw her go in there, I knew something was up. I was dealing faro. I turned the gave over to another dealer and sneaked in the next box.

"These partitions are like a sounding board. Jewett was drunk, or doped. His voice was so thick I couldn't make out what he said."

"Didn't you hear anything?" Copley demanded impatiently.

Redfield shook his head.

"But the point is, if Jewett did tell her about the gold shipment, she's got to get the information to the gang tonight. I can keep my eye on her here—inside. Woodruff's watching the alley. You get around to the front door. I've a hunch

she'll lead us straight to the hangout."

Copley was silent. He felt rotten. He wished he could chuck the whole mess. He pushed himself wearly to his feet.

"All right," he said; "it's worth a try."

A CHILL WIND blew between the mountains whipping down Deadwood's crooked main street. Copley, lounging just outside the Melodeon, pulled the brown coat tighter about his thick shoulders, settled the uncomfortable hard hat more snugly on his head.

He could see Woodruff, the Wells-Fargo officer, standing at the mouth of the alley, a darker shadow in the night, his cigarette glowing like a small red hole in a furnace.

Woodruff was a good man, an old-timer. Copley envied the older man's cold, unhurried efficiency.

Woodruff moved suddenly, making a circle with the cigarette butt. He seemed to fade into the night and vanish. He'd taken refuge in a doorway, Copley guessed.

With a start, he realized that Faith must have left the Melodeon by the alley door. His pulse leaped. He stepped inside, beckoned Redfield, who was acting as look-out at a faro game, then turned back to the door.

When Redfield joined him, the gambler had the double barreled sawed off shot-gun under his Prince Albert. They stood there, just inside the Melodeon, watching the stream of pedestrians on the board walk.

They had to wait only a moment before Faith appeared. She was wearing a long, dark blue coat and a big hat. Her head was bent; she looked straight in front as she went past on her frivolous french heels.

Copley's wide, pleasant mouth thinned, turned down, became not so pleasant. In spite of everything, he realized that he'd been hoping Faith wasn't mixed up with the road agents. Right up to this minute, he'd half believed Redfield was wrong.

The gambler nudged him. "Come on. There's Woodruff."

They joined the Wells-Fargo officer on the board walk. Redfield said: "Don't crowd her." Nothing else was said as they drifted after the hurrying figure in the shapeless blue coat.

She led them down past Chinatown, past the noisy cribs and brothels. Further down it was darker and there were fewer people on the street. They let the distance between them lengthen.

Almost before Copley realized it, they were beyond the town, paralleling a creek. Here there were shacks and tents and splashes of lantern light.

It was quiet except for the chuckling murmur of the water and the hum of Deadwood was like a drowsy beehive behind them. Copley could barely make out the girl's hurrying figure in the starshine. A wolf howled eerily on Apache Hill.

The girl stopped.

Copley felt Redfield's fingers close about his arm. Then light sprayed out on the ground as the flap of a tent was thrown back. He saw Faith duck inside.

Woodruff said: "Give her a chance to get clear."

They drew back off the trail, waited. Copley felt stiff and cold. He touched the cold butt of the revolver thrust into his waistband for reassurance, but it didn't give him any.

When the girl reappeared, he felt a vague shock. As if he hadn't really expected to see her emerge from the tent.

She hurried back towards Deadwood, passing within ten feet of them. Then she was gone, swallowed by the night.

"All right," said Woodruff; "we may as well take 'em."

The Wells-Fargo officer was in the lead, a forty-four Colt in his hand. Copley was at his left, Redfield a little behind and on the right. The tent loomed just ahead with light seeping from beneath the edges—a pale yellow pyramid.

A stick cracked beneath the gambler's boots.

"Who's that?" a voice yelled hoarsely from the tent.

Woodruff lunged forward, swept the tent flap aside.

"Hold it!" he barked.

There was a roar—two of them almost together. Gouts of orange flame leaped from Woodruff. The officer flinched backwards. He seemed to bow in the

middle and fall over on his face.

Copley caught a glimpse of Mis' Bill, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a nervous grimace, a gun that looked big as a cannon in his hand. There was another man in the tent, but Copley scarcely was aware of him. He was thumbing back the hammer when the sawed-off shotgun turned loose a blast of buckshot behind him.

Powder grains stung Copley's neck. He thought his ear drums had burst. They rang and rang.

Mis' Bill was literally hurled backwards across a wooden packing case, a hole in his chest as big as his fist.

Copley snapped a shot at the other man, but the explosion of his Smith and Wesson was drowned in the roar of the shotgun as Redfield let go with the second barrel.

Mis' Bill's partner dropped as if a trap door had been opened beneath his feet. He didn't move. Dark red blood ran out of his mouth and nose, muddying the dirt floor.

For a moment the silence held. It was an oppressive thing, as if for the space of a heartbeat every living thing had paused to listen.

Then it broke. There were shouts, running feet.

Redfield, who had dropped beside Woodruff, stood up. "Heart and stomach," he said. "They both got him. He was dead when he hit the ground."

The gambler moved on past Copley into the tent, stuffing cartridges into the short, ugly shotgun. He tore open Mis' Bill's shirt, unbuckled a money belt. He pulled out a sheaf of crisp new twenties, handed one to Copley.

"Are these the bills?"

Copley saw the mark in green ink.

"Yeh. This is the money. Who was his partner?"

"Turkey Tom Pickett. He was overdue for a dose of lead." Redfield was dragging a money belt from around Pickett's waist. "This closes it up, I reckon."

Somebody shouted, "What's going on?" There were other voices from the darkness, and bobbing lanterns.

Copley said: "How much of it have you got there?"

Redfield fanned out the packets of banknotes from Mis' Bill's and Pickett's money belts.

"About five thousand dollars at a guess. We can grab the girl. I've a hunch she can lead us to the rest of it."

Copley didn't say anything.

Wells-Fargo had lost over two hundred thousands dollars in gold in these holdups. If the girl knew where it was hidden, they'd get the information out of her.

He felt a little sick.

COPLEY didn't wait for the sheriff, but hurried back to town. He wanted to find Faith and let her know about her brother. If he could persuade the girl to disclose the location of the loot, he was pretty sure that she could strike a bargain with Wells-Fargo.

Faith wasn't at the Melodeon though, nor was she in her room.

With mounting alarm, he went around to the telegraph office, sent off a long report to Joe Bowen in Cheyenne. He was just returning to the street when he caught sight of Sheriff Sam Maule and a deputy bearing down on him.

"Whoa there, son," the sheriff called. "I've been looking for you."

Copley stopped, allowed Maule to catch up with him. The sheriff was a portly man, well over six feet tall. He towered a full head above Copley.

"Son," said the sheriff; "I hate to do this," and stuck a gun in the small of Copley's back. "Get his pistol, Hank," he told the deputy.

Hank found the Smith and Wesson, thrust it into his own pocket.

"What is this?" Copley demanded angrily. "A joke?"

"It's no joke, son. We found the rest of the money. Ten thousand dollars of it."

"Where?"

"Why, I don't mind telling you, son," Maule said in a dry, amused tone. "It was in your room at the Overland. Kind of a slick trick, tackin' the packages to the bottom of the washstand thataway. Come along, son. We got a little palaverin' to do."

Copley was too stunned to protest. He allowed himself to be shepherded into the sheriff's office—a bare, little room, the log walls hung with reward posters. There was a squat wood stove giving off a smell of dead ashes and a battered desk, a few stools and a cabinet.

It was lit by two kerosene lamps on wall brackets. The deputy closed the door, put a stool against it and sat down.

"Rest your feet," the sheriff said and hitched his bulk onto the desk top, pushed back his broad brimmed gray hat, stared at Copley with direct gray eyes.

Copley sank onto a stool. He'd begun to collect his wits. "I don't reckon you'll believe it, but that money must've been planted in my room—"

The sheriff's eyes hardened. "I ain't in the habit of going off half-cocked. Nobody knowed you was bringing that money."

Copley said hotly, "Plenty of people knew. Redfield for one—"

"Don't try to tell me that, son. I checked with Cheyenne. Nobody knowed you was bringing the money. Nobody! They all thought it was in the treasure box."

Copley's mouth shut like a steel trap. So Redfield hadn't been told that he was bringing the currency in the satchel! But the gambler's first words had been, *"They didn't get the money!"*

Not a question but a statement of fact.

No one could have known that but the road agents themselves, after they had broken open the express box and had found it empty! It had been a slip of Redfield's tongue, and the gambler must have realized it was a slip immediately he had said it.

Copley began to understand why Redfield was trying so desperately to frame him.

His face suddenly blackened.

The sheriff said, "Son, your story just don't hang together. But we'll know more about that, I reckon, when he get our hands on Faith Emory. She'll be plenty willing to talk after the trap you set for her brother."

"I set!"

"Sure. Redfield told us how you got him and Woodruff to trail the girl down to 'Miss' Bill's claim. Probably after you'd sent her down there yourself with some cock-an'-bull story."

"Redfield had the gall to say that?"

"Yep. Oh, it was slick, son. You fixed it so the rest of the gang got killed, leaving you with all the loot and the credit too for roundin' up the roadagents. You might've got away with it, if we hadn't of found them bills in your room."

"Redfield put you up to searching my room?"

"Well, yes, he did."

Copley's blue eyes were narrow slits.

"Where's Faith?"

Maule shrugged massive shoulders. "She's disappeared, but she can't get out of town and Redfield's looking for her."

"Redfield!" Copley shouted in sudden fury. Then his round, wind-roughened face looked as suddenly pinched. "My God, if Redfield finds her he'll kill her! He'll have to in order to make his story stick."

The sheriff looked disappointed.

"Son, the game's up. But there's still the matter of the two hundred thousand in gold. If you turn that back, the Express Company's willing to go easy——"

"God damn it!" Copley interrupted; "while you're sitting here shooting off your mouth, Faith might be getting murdered this minute."

Maule started to speak.

"No! You listen to me!" Copley said. "Redfield did know about the roadagents missing the seventeen thousand dollars. He told me to put it in the Overland safe since the bank was closed.

"What's more it was Redfield that set the trap for 'Miss' Bill and Pickett. It was Redfield that killed them. It must've been Redfield who planted that money in my room."

Maule said: "Lock him up," in a disgusted voice to the deputy.

The deputy got to his feet. So did Copley.

"Listen," he said desperately. "You want to recover that two hundred thousand, don't you?"

"Yeh," said Maule; "where is it?"

Copley hesitated, racking his brains frantically. What could Redfield have done with the loot? It wouldn't be in his

room. That was far too risky. The gambler would want it someplace safe, close at hand.

Safe! Good Lord! The safe at the Overland! It was so obvious that no one would think to look for the gold from the stage robberies there.

"Come on," the sheriff growled. "Speak up, son. Where is it?"

Copley's blue eyes glittered. He said: "Let's go. I'll show you."

Maule shook his head.

Copley's jaw set. "All right, lock me up."

"Now listen, son. This ain't doing you no good. You tell us where the money's hid——"

"No," said Copley. "Put the cuffs on me, if you want, but either I'll take you to it or I'll rot in jail before I say anything."

Maule frowned.

"It's right in camp," Copley prodded.

"All right," Maule said. "We'll go. But no tricks. I'm warning you, son."

COPLEY led the wary officers straight to the Overland hotel, asked the startled clerk if Redfield had put any packages in the hotel safe.

"Why, yes," the clerk said. He was a thin, bald man with watery blue eyes. "He's asked us to keep some gold for him from time to time. He doesn't trust banks. Besides he's a gambler, you know, and likes to have his money where he can put his hands on it at any time."

Maule's eyes narrowed.

Copley said, "Let's see it."

"But, really Mr. Copley, we can't do that——"

"Open up the safe," said the sheriff.

The clerk swallowed. Then he nodded unhappily, turned to the massive iron safe that had been freighted in over the mountains, and fumbled open the door. He began to pile small, heavy, paper-wrapped parcels on the counter.

The sheriff tore off the wrappings of one, disclosing a small canvas sausage. It was stuffed tight with the yellow metal.

"Redfield give you these himself?" he asked the clerk, who bit his lip and nodded.

Maule lifted the packages in his hand, counted them.

The clerk said: "Mr. Redfield valued them at a hundred and seventy thousand dollars."

The sheriff shove the rolls toward the clerk. "Put these back in the safe." He swung on Copley. "Son, I'm apologizing. I happen to know Redfield has made no killing gambling. If he had I'd of heard of it. Fact is, he was about fifteen thousand dollars in debt to Dave Lusk at the Melodeon——"

"There's no time for that now!" Copley interrupted harshly. "We've got to find Faith before he kills her! Give me my gun back!"

The sheriff scratched his chin.

"Hank, root out Clark and Ludlow. Take the lower town. If you can't find the girl bring Redfield in anyway. I'll cover the upper part with a couple of the boys. Copley I'm deputizing you."

Copley said: "Give me my gun, Maule. I'm going to the Melodeon."

"We've been to the Melodeon."

"Listen," said Copley, "I've been a damn fool. I've been so suspicious of Faith that I haven't been able to see anything else. This is my fault, Maule. For God's sake, give me back my gun and let me go!"

At a nod from the sheriff, Hank returned the revolver. Copley snatched it, broke it open, checked the loads. Then he thrust it into his waistband, ran out on the boardwalk leaving them staring after him.

MOST of the girls hired by Dave Lusk lived in rooms above the Melodeon adding thereby to both Dave's and their incomes. Faith didn't. Faith had a room over a cafe. But Copley thought he might get a line on where she could be hiding from Dolly. Dolly was the only one at the theatre with whom Faith was the least bit intimate.

He burst into the garish, smokey, noisy atmosphere of the Melodeon, caught sight of Dolly beside the bar. He pushed across the floor to her side.

"Dolly," he said in a low, harsh voice and grabbed her arm. "Where's Faith?"

"Oh, it's you," se said. The lines in her face had deepened. Her blonde hair was mussed. "She's around someplace, I

suppose. I haven't seen her."

Copley's eyes burned into hers.

"Where is she?" he hissed. "Don't you understand, you little fool, Redfield's looking for her to kill her! He——"

"Redfield!" Dolly put her hand to her mouth. Her face looked suddenly like a mask. "Not Redfield! I just saw him going upstairs——"

"She's in your room then?"

"Yes." She pushed him away. "Hurry. Third door on the right."

Copley threaded his way to the stage door, ducked past the curtain, found himself in the wings. A rough, open stair on his left led up to the second floor.

He heard a thump from overhead, followed by a crash and a scream.

Copley never knew how he got up the steps. He reached the head of the stairs just in time to see Redfield kick in the door of a room about half way down the hall. There was a long barreled Colt in the gambler's hand.

"Redfield!" Copley called in a terrible voice.

The gambler spun around. Copley's bullet broke his leg. He went down as if his feet had been swept out from under him. He scrabbled around desperately on the floor, trying to bring the Colt to bear.

Copley shot him in the head. He kept pulling the trigger until the hammer clicked on a spent shell.

The acrid fumes of burnt powder lay in sheets along the hall. Shouts and screams echoed from below stairs.

Copley methodically reloaded, put the gun in his waistband. He walked down the hall toward the prone gambler, stepped over him into Dolly's room.

Faith was crouched against the opposite wall.

"Cal!" she cried, and ran across the room into his arms. "You're not hurt?"

"No. Faith, who sent you out to 'Miss' Bill's claim tonight?"

The girl shivered against him.

"It——it was Redfield. He sent me to warn my brother. They were to get out of camp immediately and go to a certain place in the hills that Redfield said they'd know about. When——when I saw what happened, I knew Redfield had betrayed them, I——"

The girl was catching her breath in shuddering sobs. Copley could hear the pound of feet on the stair. He said, "You knew 'Miss' Bill was one of the road agents all the time?"

"No, Cal. No, not until the holdup. Bill was the man in the road. I recognized his voice. I believed him when he said he'd struck it rich. I really was in Cheyenne to see about buying an eating house."

Outside somebody said, "My Lord, you could cover them holes with a silver dollar!"

They could hear the sheriff bellowing for the people to clear out and let him through.

"But how did you know about the currency?"

"Bill told me. He was in Cheyenne. He didn't want me to take the stage. But he wouldn't say why. I—I was suspicious. When he rode out ahead of the stage, I took it anyway."

The tightness went out of Copley. He drew a long breath. "Faith," he said, the blood suddenly staining his cheek bones; "I reckon I've kinda had the wrong slant on women. I don't know so much about 'em——"

"It ain't a question of knowing the critters, son," boomed the sheriff who had forged inside; "you've got to have Faith, that's all!"

"He has," Faith said in a small, weak voice.

THE WHITE BUFFALO

By HENRY RICHARDSON

Only the sacred White Buffalo of the Apaches could save Trader Jim Bradford from the burning stake of the great shamen Spotted Horse!

JIM BRADFORD STARED AT the lean young brave across the battered counter of his trading post. It was Grey Wolf, the chief's son. They were friends, had sworn the oath of blood brotherhood. But Grey Wolf showed no sign of that friendship now. His eyes held the coldness of glittering obsidian, and his voice was menacing.

"Trader," he said in his own tongue, "if you kill the white buffalo—you die by my hand!" As he spoke, brown sinewy fingers closed over the haft of the long knife that hung at his side.

Surprise twisted the corners of Jim Bradford's flat mouth. "Why should I

Gregg rushed again, his huge fists swinging. Behind him, Jim saw the on-rushing herd.

kill the albino bull?" he asked softly. "I have always lived by your laws."

Grey Wolf met Jim's gaze unwaveringly. "Spotted Horse, our medicine man, has said you would take the pelt back to your people."

Jim's face hardened. He'd long suspected that the medicine man resented his increasing influence with the tribe. "Spotted Horse speaks with a crooked tongue," Jim said bitterly.

Grey Wolf's eyes were cold. "Spotted Horse is a great shaman . . ."

A wily old fake, Jim thought, but checked the reply. He knew that the medicine man's hold on the superstitious mind of the Indian went beyond the bounds of friendship. Arguing would only make the situation worse. "You trusted me before," Jim said. "You must trust me now. Your albino buffalo is safe from me."

Grey Wolf's fingers still toyed with the knife. "See that it is so," he said. Then, without another word, he turned and strode to the door. The sunlight glinted on his copper ornaments.

FOR LONG moments, Jim stood there, his body tense beneath the fringed buckskins that he wore. A tall man, whalebone-tough, he had spent half of his thirty years in this farflung outpost beyond the frontier, taking over this trading post at the death of his father ten years ago. His hair was long and dark, his face bronzed and creased from too much sun.

Jim knew what the albino meant to the Indians of Grey Wolf's tribe. Ever since it had appeared, hunting had been good. In the minds of the Indians, the white buffalo was an omen, a sign from the great spirit which they all held sacred.

Jim had thought that he had firmly established himself with the tribe, that he had convinced them of his fairness and good will. But now his most trusted friend had suddenly turned against him, had accused him of having designs upon the albino.

He had been here among these people long enough to know that there must be a reason. But what could it be? Spotted Horse, the medicine man, certainly resented Jim's growing influence upon the tribe. And Spotted Horse had started the rumor that Jim was going to kill the albino. Yet certainly Spotted Horse would not wish to see the albino harmed. Which could only mean that someone was working through the medicine man to ruin Jim's growing business with the tribe. There was no other answer.

And then, suddenly, Jim thought of Sam Gregg, the white trapper. The man who only recently had become his enemy. Sam Gregg, the only other white man in the territory, the man who had sworn that he would get even with Jim, was the cause of Grey Wolf's sudden distrust.

Sam Gregg had come to the high plains of the upper Missouri only a few months before to run a trap line in the winter, and to furnish meat for the river steamboats in the summer. He did not share Jim's belief in fair dealings with the Indians. They had clashed violently when Jim had caught him plying them with whiskey to cheat them out of their winter's catch.

Jim knew that Gregg hated him. He knew that Gregg wanted to take over the trade which he had built up. And he knew that Gregg had become very friendly with the medicine man.

As his thoughts centered upon it, Jim grew more and more certain of Gregg's part in the scheme. With Jim condemned in advance, Gregg could easily kill the albino, sell the hide for a high price down the river, and then return just as the winter trading started.

Now, Jim looked out across the rolling expanse of the high plains country. He could see a returning hunting party coming over the crest of a hill, moving toward the Indian encampment in the cottonwoods. The mounted braves jogged proudly in front. The squaws trudged in the dust behind the loaded travoix—loaded with hides and buffalo meat. Jim knew when the party had gone out. They were returning sooner than he had expected. It meant that the buffalo herd was close, and he had to move fast.

Jim quickly packed buffalo jerky and cornmeal into his saddle bags. Sam Gregg might even now be moving out after the albino. The herd must be less than a

two-day ride away, but there still might be time to head the trapper off.

An old Indian was dozing against the mud-chinked wall of the trading post as Jim closed the door and locked it. When he had saddled his horse and slid his rifle into the boot, he noticed the Indian rise and glide silently toward the cottonwoods by the creek. He knew that the whole camp would soon be informed of his departure.

On the ridge above the post, Jim checked his horse and looked back. The low log building that was his trading post and living quarters nestled close against the hillside. Near the creek, smoke rose lazily from the Indian encampment. There below him was everything he had worked for: the trading post he had built, the people he had learned to respect, whose trust he had gained through years of honest dealings.

Now it was all threatened. Not only his life's work, but his life as well hung in the balance of one man's greed. With a low curse on his lips Jim wheeled his horse savagely and rode down the other side of the slope.

IT WAS an hour's ride to Gregg's cabin. The squat log structure, hardly more than a dug-out, was built into the steep river bank, screened by a thicket of wild plum and bullberry. No sign of smoke came from the crumbling mud chimney.

Jim dismounted, threw aside the buffalo hide flap that served as a door, and peered into the gloomy interior. The only sign of life was the buzzing of flies around the crumbs of food spilled on the crude table. The earthen floor was damp, and the air was sour with smoke, and the musky odor of pelts. Gregg's rifle was gone from the pegs above the sagging log bunk.

Jim let the flap fall and turned to remount, then stiffened in surprise. The ugly black muzzle of a Sharp's buffalo gun was staring him in the face. The muddy agate eyes of Sam Gregg looked at him across the sights.

Gregg was a huge, hulking man with the build of an up-ended grizzly. His stubbled red face was split in a triumphant grin, and a chuckle rumbled from his massive chest. "I saw you comin', Bradford. Thanks for makin' it easy!"

The sound of Gregg's rasping voice set Jim's teeth on edge. He stood rooted to the spot, but his eyes flicked to the rifle in his saddle boot and back to Gregg, measuring the distance.

Gregg's eyes narrowed. "Turn around, me bucko. And put your hands behind you."

Jim hesitated. He saw Gregg's trigger finger tighten, saw the cold hate behind the malevolent grin. Reluctantly he obeyed.

He felt a rawhide thong whip around his wrists and jerk tight. The leather bit into his flesh. Helpless rage rose up and choked him.

Jim looked back over his shoulder. His lips were tight across his teeth. "What's your game, Gregg?" he demanded.

The trapper took another turn of the leather and knotted it tightly. "You'll find out," he grunted.

Seizing Jim by the shoulder Gregg turned him around and pushed him toward his horse, prodding him with the rifle. "Climb on," he ordered. "We're going to take a little ride."

Jim stepped into the stirrup, and Gregg's powerful grip propelled him into the saddle. He sat straining at his bonds, looking down silently as the trapper caught up the reins and led the horse around the thicket to where his own mount was concealed.

Gregg mounted and started off at a fast lope, leading Jim's horse behind. Jim tried to adjust himself to the saddle. His arms were pulled painfully tight behind him, making it difficult for him to maintain his balance.

As they sped over the springy prairie sod Jim kept his eyes on the broad back of the trapper. Gregg was urging his horse forward turning from time to time to scan the hills behind them.

Jim wondered what was going through Gregg's mind. The trapper seemed to ignore him now, seemed intent only on putting distance behind them. Their course zigzagged through the rolling hills, avoid-

ing the ridges, keeping to the low ground. Jim noticed that the general direction was eastward toward the head of Horn Valley where the buffalo herd had last been seen.

At last Gregg checked the winded horses deep in a brush grown draw. Dismounting, he tied the reins and began climbing up the side of a hill.

Twisting in the saddle to ease his cramped muscles, Jim watched him. As he neared the summit Gregg dropped to his belly and crawled up until he was peering over the top. For a long time he lay watching before he turned and clambered down. His beefy face was wreathed in satisfaction when he approached. "Nary an Injun in sight," he said. "I thought they might've been follerin' you."

He took a generous chew of tobacco and looked up at Jim as he wadded it into his cheek. "It wouldn't do to have 'em see me," he continued. "They think I left yesterday."

Jim kept silent. He wanted to question the trapper, but did not want to give the appearance of being concerned. He could tell by Gregg's actions that he was proud of his scheme. Sooner or later he would have to boast.

Gregg began adjusting his saddle girth. "Yessir!" he said, "I'm sure gonna have me a time in St. Louis with what the white buffler pelt will bring me."

Jim did not comment. Gregg went on, "An' you, mister high-and-mighty! You'll have your hair danglin' from a lodge pole! When it's all over they'll trade at *my* post, on *my* terms . . ."

Jim laughed harshly. "You'll never get away with it, Gregg! When the Indians see that I haven't got the pelt they'll track you down before you ever get to the river. And besides, how will they figure I could kill the buffalo with my hands tied?"

Gregg swung into the saddle. "I took care of all that. I've got the medicine man sold plenty on the idea that you'll do it. When they find that buff dead, he'll see that you don't get a chance to do any explainin'. As for bein' tied—you'll be around to take the blame, an' there won't be no doubt about it. I've got that all figured."

They rode until long after darkness had closed down around them like a blanket and the stars were winking over the hills. Jim was reeling with weariness as Gregg pulled to a halt in a dry wash. The cramped muscles of his back ached and his hands were numb below the tightly bound raw hide cord.

He was conscious of the quietness of the prairie, the damp coolness of the night air. Then a thought came to life in his tired brain, *damp rawhide stretches!* If there was enough dew . . .

Furiously he strained against the thong. It seemed to give a little. Then Gregg turned and he sat quietly.

The trapper wheeled his horse and pulled up beside him, facing him. "This is where I leave you. We're over half way to the head of Horn Valley. That's where the buffler are grazin'. I can make it by daylight. Then I'll locate the herd, an' be on my way." Jim could not see Gregg's face but his voice revealed his satisfaction.

Jim kneed his horse and it sidled away. He strained again at the thong, felt it give. Whatever Gregg's plans were he needed only a little time, he thought. If Gregg would only keep talking . . .

"What about the rest of the plan?" Jim asked. "I still don't see . . ."

Gregg reined up close again. "You're gonna sleep for a while ," he said.

Jim saw starlight glint on the rifle barrel. He swayed to the side trying to dodge the blow that he saw coming. The barrel caught him above the ear. There was an explosion in his head. He slumped forward in the saddle, then sank into a well of roaring darkness.

JIM WAS CONSCIOUS first of the grass pressed against his face, then of the stabbing pain as he moved his head. He tried to rise, but sank back with a groan. When the wave of dizziness had passed he sat up. Dully he realized that he was still at the bottom of the dry wash. The rawhide thong was gone from his wrists! His horse stood nearby.

The world seemed to swim in a red haze as he leaned back against a rock and held his throbbing head in his hands.

He had to fight the urge to lie back and rest. A glance at the sky showed him that the Big Dipper had swung far in its arc around the Pole Star. It had been almost two hours since they had ridden into the wash.

Supporting himself against the rock he got to his feet and stood swaying. Then he stumbled unsteadily toward his horse. He caught up the reins and leaned against the pommel trying to make his reeling brain form some plan of action.

He knew that with Gregg's head start he would be hard put to catch up with the trapper and prevent him from killing the buffalo. And yet he dared not turn back. He was too close to the herd. The Indians knew when he had left the post. If they saw him riding in in the morning, and later found the buffalo killed and skinned they would believe only that he had hidden the pelt. Gregg had planned well.

Jim was aroused from his thoughts by a tug on the reins. Against the starlight he could see the dim outline of his horse. The animal had its head thrown up, its nostrils flaring into the wind.

He squeezed the horse's muzzle tightly with his hand, and listened intently. At first there was only the sighing of the wind through the grass. Far out on the plain a night owl's cry seemed to mock him. But the horse's nervousness was unmistakable.

Then he heard it. The soft thud of a horse's hooves, and a nicker in the darkness. The sound came from along the back trail. He remembered the old Indian slipping away from the trading post, and knew what was making the sound. It would be a party of braves combing the prairie for him.

He stood tensely, holding the horse's head, waiting for the other horses to go past. There was no sound. He knew that his presence was suspected. He knew that somewhere in the darkness other ears were listening, keen eyes were watching for a movement against the skyline. How many, he didn't know.

The horse stirred restlessly, and Jim ran a trembling hand along his neck to steady him. Sooner or later the horse would betray him. Carefully he slipped the rifle from its scabbard and retreated silently, deeper into the dry wash. He heard a stamp and a whinny behind him. There was a quick swishing in the grass, followed by a series of muttering grunts, and he knew that the Indians had found his horse.

He crouched in the darkness, and heard the sharp note of disappointment in the voice of one of the Indians. He realized that they had expected to find him asleep. In a moment they would be fanning out, searching for him.

Jim crept over the rim of the wash and slid into the tall grass. He wriggled forward, gliding as silently as he could, his only thought to put as much space between himself and the Indians as possible. At last he stopped, breathing heavily. Far behind him he could hear the stirring of the searching braves.

He wriggled forward again until his elbows were sore, then he paused. He knew that there was no chance of getting to his horse, and that even if he did the braves could circle and trap him. His only chance was to continue on foot. He stood up and started to run at a steady jog trot. The pain in his head had subsided now to a dull ache that throbbed with every step.

At last he stopped to catch his breath. He had left the Indians far behind now, and there was time to think. He realized the hopelessness of his position. Left on foot on the endless plains he would be tracked down by the Indians in vengeance for the death of the albino. And Gregg was mounted, with a two-hour start. There would be no hope of stopping him.

At dawn Gregg would be at the head of Horn Valley where the buffalo herd had been seen the day before. The Indians had reported seeing them there, the vanguard of the Northward migration. The migration! Jim's tired shoulders lifted, and a spark of hope kindled within him, as he thought, *the buffalo won't be there in the morning!*

He realized his advantage then. Gregg had only recently come to the plains country, and had not yet learned the ways of the buffalo. Gregg had heard that the

buffalo were at the head of the valley. He would expect them to remain there grazing in circles like cattle.

But Jim knew different. The buffalo were now on their early summer migration, moving up from the south, grazing steadily as they went. Entering Horn Valley they would follow the lush grass of the valley floor, and would bed down far from their starting point.

From his years in the territory, Jim knew every inch of the land for miles around. He thought now of Horn Valley, how it took its name from the way it curved between the rocky ridges that flanked it. From its head toward which Gregg had ridden, due east of where Jim stood, it extended north and then curved sharply westward.

He glanced quickly up at the stars and reckoned his position. He thought of the speed with which grazing buffalo moved. Before nightfall the herd would have rounded the curve of the valley, and he knew where they would bed down. There was a water-hole in the valley almost directly north of where he now stood!

He realized with exultation that he was at this moment nearer to the herd than Gregg was. By walking steadily he could reach the water-hole by early morning. Gregg would still have to trail and locate the herd. With luck Jim could be lying in wait when the trapper rode up . . .

THE STARS were pale and the first streaks of dawn were lacing the eastern clouds with crimson when Jim dragged his weary limbs over a boulder strewn summit. Below him was the wide valley hemmed in by rocky ridges.

Through the rising mist he could see hundreds of dark wooly forms dotting the slopes where the buffalo were bedded down. The immense herd was spread out far across the valley. Here and there cows with gangling calves at their sides were stirring and moving out to graze. At the edge of the herd a great bull wheeled, testing the wind, his muscles moving smoothly under his dark shaggy hide. The albino was not in sight.

Jim began to skirt the valley, keeping to the cover of the boulders at the edge. He knew that sight of him might bring the surly bull charging down on him, or startle a nervous young cow into stampeding the herd.

It was an hour later and Jim had almost circled the herd, when he sighted the albino. The buffalo were coming to life now, starting to move. Caught in the press of dark crowding forms, the great grey-white hump stood out like a fleck of foam on dark swirling water. Then he moved out into the open and stood at the edge of the herd.

The albino was a magnificent specimen, with a massive head and a hump that towered over any bull in the herd. He stood frozen, like a great marble statue, gazing up at the ridge with his pale, near-sighted eyes. Then he shook his shaggy poll and wrinkled his pink muzzle as he sniffed the breeze. He moved restlessly as though sensing the presence of an enemy.

Jim breathed a sigh of relief to see the animal safe, then sat down between two boulders to wait. Suddenly, the albino wheeled and plunged back into the herd. At the same moment, the heavy crash of a Sharps and a cloud of smoke came from the rocks a quarter of a mile to Jim's right.

Jim leaped to his feet, rifle in hand and started to run toward the spot. He cursed bitterly. He had not considered that Gregg might get there before him.

The buffalo were milling about nervously, trying to identify the direction from which the sound had come. Through the rising film of dust only an occasional flash of the grey-white form could be seen.

As Jim dodged between the boulders, he could imagine Gregg peering down over the sights, waiting for another clear shot. He urged his aching muscles to redoubled speed. The herd was becoming more and more restless. Panic was spreading like a contagion.

A rattle of rocks behind him made him throw a quick glance backward. A spotted Indian pony plunged over the crest of the ridge. Grey Wolf was crouched on the saddle pad; a rifle in his hands, his face contorted with fury.

The Indian pulled his pony back on its

haunches. "You lie, Trader!" he shouted.

For a moment Jim was paralyzed. His rifle slid to the ground. "But I didn't shoot!" he said and point, "It was . . ."

"You lie!" the Indian said again, and leveled the rifle.

Jim saw Grey Wolf's finger tighten on the trigger, and knew there was no time for palaver. Lunging, he grasped the pony's rawhide hackamore. The pony plunged and twisted and the rifle dropped from the Indian's hands as he tried to regain control.

As Grey Wolf struggled to keep his seat, Jim reached out, grasped the Indian's leg, and pulled. Grey Wolf fell from the maddened pony's back, and sprawled among the rocks. He leaped to his feet, catlike and snarling. As he came at Jim he whipped the long knife from its scabbard.

Jim twisted and the keen blade whipped down, slicing the front of his buckskin shirt. They grappled then, among the boulders, Jim still clinging to the rawhide hackamore. Fiercely Grey Wolf twisted his lithe torso, trying to get his knife into play. Jim crashed a shoulder into the Indian, throwing him off balance. Then he lashed out with a powerful blow that cracked against Grey Wolf's jaw. The brave crumpled and slid down among the rocks.

Jim turned, and seizing the mane of the snorting, plunging pony, he flung himself onto its back. The buffalo nearby had been frightened by the plunging of Grey Wolf's horse and were lining out, tails up in a dead stampede. The panic spread and soon the whole herd was running madly. Jim could see the white hump of the albino was bobbing near the edge.

As Jim rode toward the spot where Gregg had been, he saw the trapper ride out from behind a huge boulder and take up the pursuit. Lower down the slope, and intent on his target, Gregg had not noticed the struggle among the boulders. In a moment he was fading from sight into the swirling cloud of dust that rolled up from the drumming hooves of the buffalo.

Jim guided the wiry Indian pony between the boulders, and out into the open. Then he gave him his head. With exultation he felt the surge of lithe, powerful muscles beneath him. The pony was Grey Wolf's favorite buffalo horse, and he had the smell of the hunt in his nostrils.

LEANING LOW over the pony's withers, Jim rode into the boiling, biting cloud of dust. Soon he was passing the stragglers of the herd. The rolling thunder of the stampede, the rank smell of hot wooly bodies was all around him.

Through a rift in the murky pall of dust he could see the flapping fringe of Gregg's buckskins close ahead. Then the dust closed in again. Jim trusted himself to his horse. The pony, well trained and wise in the way of buffalo, checked and swerved, picking out openings between the crowding, hurtling forms where Jim could see none.

The pony squeezed between two lumbering bodies, so close that the shaggy wool rubbed against Jim's legs on either side. Jim could see the red rimmed, rolling eyes of the maddened beasts. Suddenly one of them stumbled and went down turning end over end. In a flash the buffalo was swallowed up in the crowding rush that neither slowed nor swerved. Jim closed his eyes, praying that there would be no chuck holes in his pony's path.

The fog of dust lifted momentarily, and Jim saw the trapper hardly more than a horse's length ahead. Gregg was closing in on the albino. He raised his rifle and took aim. Jim shouted but the sound was swallowed in the deafening roar of hooves.

Even as flame spouted from the rifle, Gregg's horse was jostled and the shot went wild. Then the billowing dust closed down again, blotting the trapper from sight.

The Indian pony side stepped and surged past a huddle of charging forms. Again Jim could see the trapper, close ahead now, with the gap narrowing rapidly. Gregg was leaning forward, trying to maneuver between the buffalo that separated him from the albino, trying to get within point blank range for a sure shot.

Jim saw the trapper raise his rifle again, aiming almost directly down at the bobbing grey-white hump. At that range he could not miss.

The Indian pony was gaining rapidly. His head was even with Gregg's knee. Without stopping to think, Jim got to his feet on the saddle pad, and hurled himself at Gregg. His clawing fingers brushed the greasy collar of the trapper's shirt, clutched, and held. Gregg's horse reared and spun as Jim pulled himself up behind the saddle.

As he clung to Gregg's burly shoulders, trying to get his hands on the rifle, he felt rather than heard the hoarse yell of rage and fear that burst from the trapper's lips. Gregg twisted fiercely, trying to shake him free.

Jim could feel the horse plunging under him as if it was buffeted by the passing buffalo. He felt jarring pain as the trapper drove an elbow into his ribs. He slid to the side but kept his grip on the buckskin shirt. Snatches of Gregg's rantings came back to him above the drumming of hooves. "Fool! . . . be killed! . . ."

The horse reared again, twisted, and fell. The thinning herd split around its struggling form as the men rolled free. Jim stumbled to his feet, breathless, blinded and choking as the stragglers lumbered past.

Brushing the dust from his eyes, Jim saw Gregg scramble up and charge toward him. The trapper's eyes were slitted and his grime-streaked face was twisted with rage.

Jim side-stepped the rush and struck twice. Gregg shook off the blows and kept coming. Jim backed away. He felt weariness robbing his muscles of their strength. He brushed his hand across his eyes, trying to clear his vision.

Gregg rushed again, his huge fists swinging. Jim blocked a ponderous blow but its savage force staggered him. He struck again at the blurred face before him and heard Gregg's grunt of pain. Then sinewy fingers closed around his throat.

The vise-like grip tightened and the blood drummed in Jim's head. He twisted and struck fiercely, but felt himself going down. He threw himself backward to the ground at the same time bringing up his knee. Gregg hurtled over his head, and Jim rolled free, gulping reviving air into his lungs.

Jim twisted and hurled himself at Gregg. They rolled in the dust and the torn-up sod, Jim avoiding the clutching, gouging fingers and striking again and again.

It was a savage nightmare to Jim, and his brain reeled in a red haze. He lost all thought of self protection, felt only the need to strike and strike. He raised himself on his elbow and brought up his faltering arm to deal another blow. Then he realized that Gregg had gone limp.

DAZEDLY Jim got to his feet and stood weaving, gasping for breath. He felt a muddy trickle running down his chest and back. The breeze felt cool through his torn shirt. Far in the distance the rumbling of the stampede was fading to a whisper.

He looked down at Gregg. The trapper stirred and tried to rise, then sank back, all fight gone out of him.

Jim wiped his face on his sleeve and looked back toward the ridge. Grey Wolf had left the rocks and was making his way slowly across the torn sod. Jim turned and walked to meet him. Weariness caught up with him and he stopped and stood panting, waiting for the Indian to come up.

Grey Wolf's face was solemn, but his eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He extended his hand. "I have seen enough," he said. "You are a true friend!"

Jim gripped his hand silently. Then, at a sound behind him he turned. Gregg had retrieved his horse and was pulling himself into the saddle.

Jim looked at Grey Wolf. The Indian was watching impassively. "Aren't you going to stop him?" Jim demanded.

Grey Wolf shook his head. He turned toward the ridge and waved his arm. As Gregg spurred toward the side of the valley, a thin file of mounted warriors moved down. "They will see that he does not return," Grey Wolf said. "Come, let us return to the village. There will be feasting . . ."

The attack came as half a hundred screaming, howling savages swept through the gaping mouth of Wild Rose Pass.

TOMAHAWK TERROR

By A. KENNETH BRENT

Greater than the danger of attacking Sioux braves was the sudden duty thrust upon Corporal Sandhurst, the ex-riverboat tinhorn who wanted to desert . . .

CORPORAL MARK SANDHURST saw the smoke signal just as the little detail reached the winding approach to Wild Rose Pass. It drifted skyward in lazy puffs and lost itself against the blood-red sun hanging low over the gaunt, barren hills. Sandhurst left the position he was holding behind the lumbering Army ambulance and urged his gelding forward to the head of the escort. He touched Lieutenant Carstairs on the arm and pointed to the last lingering wisps of smoke.

The young officer studied them for a moment, and a grim tightness flattened his lips. "Did you see it all, Corporal?" he asked. "Do you know what it means?"

"Not in so many words, sir," Sandhurst told him. "But I'd say it meant trouble—for us."

Carstairs turned and Sandhurst saw uncertainty mirrored in his blue eyes. "That Crow Indian we met this afternoon," the Lieutenant said. "You think he was telling the truth about Bloody Hand leading a raiding party of Sioux off the reservation?"

Sandhurst shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "Anyway, you were smart to send him on to Fort Bannerman to report."

The Lieutenant gnawed at his under lip. "Do you think he'll really go there?" he asked.

Corporal Sandhurst smiled briefly. "He'll go," he said. "Crows don't feel any safer than whites when the Sioux is prowling."

Sandhurst returned to his place behind the ambulance and soon they reached the boulder strewn mouth of Wild Rose Pass. Lieutenant Carstairs signaled a halt.

"We'll make night camp here," he announced. "The rocks will afford some protection if we need it, and there's water in that spring yonder."

It was a poor camp site, Sandhurst thought, but no worse than the flats on each side of the Pass. He swung down from his horse and briefly appraised the other members of the detail for their fighting qualities.

There were eight enlisted men besides himself, and of the total only four had ever skirmished against Indians. The rest were recent recruits and Carstairs, the officer in charge, was six months out of West Point. Doctor Asa Meadows, civilian medic attached to Fort Bannerman and veteran of a dozen hard Sioux campaigns, was along, and he could handle a Spencer repeating carbine with the best of them. Finally, there was the woman riding in the ambulance, but she could not be counted on for any kind of help.

Ten men, over half of them green, against fifty or more warriors, led by Bloody Hand. The odds were not good and Sandhurst, a gambler, knew that in the end the better odds would always win.

He stripped the gear from his horse, watered the tired animal below the spring, and turned it into a small rope corral being set up near the camp. After this he walked over to help Private Dave Weeks who was having trouble setting up an army field tent.

When the tent was up and a cot and folding chair arranged inside, Doctor Meadows opened the door of the ambulance and offered a solicitous hand to the woman inside. Clarice Scott, a pretty, dark-haired woman in her early thirties, stepped from the high-bedded carriage and walked toward the tent. She smiled and spoke to the men near her, and they touched their hats. Wife of Fort Bannerman's commanding officer this woman had no trace of haughtiness or cool reserve about her, and, because of this, she was a favorite of every trooper in the Sixth Cavalry Regiment.

Sandhurst watched her as she entered the tent. Clarice Scott was heavy with child—it was no secret that it would be but two months before the birth of her baby—and this was the reason for the present escort they were on. Because she was not in good health, Asa Meadows had decided that Mrs. Scott should have the advantages of the hospital at Canyon City, a full seventy-five miles from the frontier outpost that was Fort Bannerman. It would be a slow trip.

AN HOUR LATER mess was over and the vast blackness of a Montana night had closed in on the little group. Sandhurst spread his blankets so that they caught a faint glow from the dying campfire, carefully sheltered by rocks so that it threw no light up against the night. He stretched out, supporting himself on one elbow, and took a deck of worn cards from the pocket of his tunic. He fashioned the cards into a perfect gambler's rose, then shuffled them with long, deft fingers, and laid out a hand of solitaire.

He played the cards with studied concentration for several minutes before he knew that someone was watching him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Asa Meadows standing there. The doctor was a big man with a lined, rugged face and iron-gray hair and mustache. He was dressed in one of the heavy black broadcloth suits that he wore winter and summer alike.

Sandhurst said, "Sit down, Doc. We'll make it two-handed."

Meadows seated himself on the edge of the blanket. When he spoke his voice was soft and smooth, seeming strangely incongruous with the size and ruggedness of the man. "You're a good man to have along at a time like this, Mark," he said. "The

others are resting easier because you're here."

"Thanks, Doc," Sandhurst said.

"You've been in the Indian fighting army quite a while now, haven't you Mark?" Asa Meadows asked.

Sandhurst said, "Two years. It seems a lot longer."

"You've done a fine job," the doctor told him. "You've made the men and officers both like you. I was wondering why you were planning on pulling out at Canyon City."

Sandhurst slowly gathered up the solitaire lay-out. "What do you mean by that, Doc?" he asked carefully.

"I mean desert." The words were blunt but Meadows' voice softened them.

A ripple of cold tension coursed through Sandhurst's body and a muscle in his jaw jumped. Involuntarily he threw a glance to where Lieutenant Carstairs was already stretched out in his blankets.

"Don't worry about Mr. Shavetail," Asa Meadows said. "He hasn't been out here long enough to know that not all men join the army to fight for fame and glory."

Sandhurst took up his bluff. "I don't know what you're talking about, Doc," he said. "But what makes you think I'm going to desert at Canyon City?"

Meadows smiled. He said, "I've been out here with the army a long time, Mark. I've seen plenty of down and out gamblers join up with the idea of fleecing the troopers and then pulling out after they'd made a stake for another whirl at the big games. Most of them got found out, but you've played it smart. You've kept your winnings at any one session small and you haven't gotten in a hurry. More than that, you've done a fine job of playing soldier. It's fooled everyone—almost."

Sandhurst built a cigarette but did not light it. "You say I'm a gambler. Why?"

"I've played poker against you," Asa Meadows said, "and I've watched your hands. There aren't many men interested in other people's hands but, being a doctor, it comes natural with me." Meadows looked down at his own stiff, stubby fingers. "Damnit, Mark, what a doctor I could have been if I had been born with your hands! Haven't you ever wanted to do anything with them besides deal pasteboards in some dingy gambling house?"

The doctor's words made Sandhurst conscious of his hands and he doubled them into tight fists, feeling the power and rhythmic grace there in even such a simple movement.

"You still haven't told me why you figured I was deserting at Canyon City," he said.

"You asked for permission to go with this detail when it looked like it was going to be just a dull, hot trip," Meadows answered. "And the paymaster at the Fort told me he had changed five thousand dollars in gold and small greenbacks into big denomination bills for you. For easy carrying, Mark?"

Sandhurst put the deck of cards back into his pocket and threw away the cigarette. "Time to turn in, Doc," he said.

Asa Meadows stood up. "The life of an army deserter isn't always a pleasant one, Mark," he said. He turned and crossed the camp to where his own bedroll was spread out.

Sandhurst slid into his blankets and stared up at the bright stars pinpointed against the blackness. He wondered how long Meadows had known the truth about him. A long time probably for the Doc was a sharp one.

Sandhurst thought back over his years in the army and he had no regrets, for he had played the game honestly according to his standards. He had risked his life on many a scouting patrol, and he had fought as well as the next man in battles with the Sioux. To him it was all a part of the gamble he knew he was taking when he had joined the army after his luck had deserted him at the poker tables of Missouri river boats. The fact that he had won money from men at Fort Bannerman who could not match his card skill did not bother him. Winning money at cards was his business.

Sandhurst ran his hand along the inside lining of his blue tunic that he still wore against the chill of the night. He heard the faint crinkle of the five one thousand dollar bills he had sewn there before leaving the fort. Enough of a stake for another try at the big gambling tables along

the Missouri. It was a good thought.

That crinkling sound and slap, slap of boots as sentries walked the black perimeter beyond the camp were the last noises Sandhurst remembered as drowsiness closed over him.

The shrill yammering of a coyote woke him, and Sandhurst saw the first streaks of pinkish gray dawn in the east. He raised himself on one elbow and listened. As the coyote's bark echoed to silence, a strange, unnatural quietness blanketed the hills surrounding the camp. Sandhurst looked over and saw that Asa Meadows was already up and shaking Lieutenant Carstairs out of his sleep. Sandhurst arose, picked up his rifle, and crossed to the doctor.

"That coyote may be the two-legged kind, I'm thinking," Meadows said.

Sandhurst nodded agreement and moved off to wake other sleeping men. Carstairs called in the two sentries and soon the ten men who made up the patrol were standing in a small group in the center of camp. Sandhurst looked at Private Dave Weaks and saw that he was shivering despite the fact that the night chill was no longer in the air. Weaks was the newest trooper of the bunch, with the regiment less than three months.

"Fill your canteens, be sure you have plenty of ammunition, and get behind a rock that fits your size," Carstairs told the men. There was a new note of authority in his voice that Sandhurst liked. The Lieutenant looked at Asa Meadows. "What about Mrs. Scott?"

"I'll tell her to stay in her tent," the doctor said. "It's as well sheltered as we can make it."

The attack came as the first splash of sunlight broke over the distant horizon. It came as half a hundred screaming, howling savages swept through the gaping mouth of Wild Rose Pass on painted horses and threw themselves head on at the little band of troopers.

For a moment it seemed that sheer weight of numbers would carry them to victory on the first surging charge. They beat against the defenders in a relentless tide, and the zing of arrows and the crash of musket fire blended with their wild, defiant whoops. The leaders were already among the rocks at the edge of camp, being pushed inevitably forward by the driving wave of warriors behind them.

And then the Spencer carbines began to speak. They opened with a salvo that sounded as one giant shot on a shout from Lieutenant Carstairs, and before the explosion had echoed to silence half a dozen Indians had tumbled from the backs of their frenzied horses.

FROM BEHIND the rocks now a deadly hail of lead poured into the front line of the red horde. That line came onward for a moment longer, and then it faltered and crumbled suddenly as the leading Indians wheeled and rode back against their fellows. For an instant there was milling confusion among the Sioux, and then the band was gone, as quickly as it had come, around the bend of the Pass.

The silence that fell was ghostly and in its way more terrifying than the attack had been. Lieutenant Carstairs rose cautiously and called the troopers to him. His face was stiff, an ashen color, but when he spoke there was no tremor in his voice.

"Where is Muldoon?" he asked tightly.

Asa Meadows said, "Finished. An arrow through his throat. He was beside me."

Private Dave Weaks wiped a hand across his face. "Will they come again — like that?" His voice broke on the last words.

"No," Sandhurst said, "not for a while. They'll snipe at us from the hills now until they think they've cut us down. Then they'll try it again. Maybe not for hours."

"Maybe they'll give it up," Weaks said eagerly. "We couldn't be very important to them when they could be out raiding for cattle or horses."

"Maybe," Sandhurst agreed. No need to tell this man that what Bloody Hand and his warriors wanted most of all was good army carbines and ammunition. They would have no easier chance to get them than this.

Carstairs said, "Keep hidden, don't waste bullets, and go easy on your water. It will be hell to get to the spring now."

Sandhurst went back to the little fort-like hollow he had found in the crevice between two rough-edged limestone bould

ers. He pushed fresh cartridges into his carbine and checked the bullets in the army Colt belted around his waist. If it came to rock to rock fighting, he would rely on it.

The firing from the hills began after twenty minutes and at first it was slow, deadly methodical. A bullet whined over Sandhurst's head and flattened itself against the rock a scant six inches above him. It drove sand grit into his eyes and a rock splinter flew against his cheek, opening a small cut.

Sandhurst thought of the odds again, and he knew that the chances of anyone in camp seeing the sun set this night would be small indeed. He thought of the five thousand dollars sewed inside his tunic and of the freedom that awaited him at Canyon City. So close and yet so far, so damnably far, away. A faint smile of irony touched his lips and he shrugged, a gambler's shrug. Fate dealt the cards and a man had to play them the best he could. If it had dealt him aces and eights today, he would back them the last chip—and the last bullet.

The tempo of the firing was increasing now, and Sandhurst could tell from the sound and direction of the shots that the Indians were slowly working their way down the rocky, sloping hills for better firing positions. He strained his eyes toward the brown rocks above him but saw nothing. Carstairs' warning to save their ammunition had been a needless one. You saw a Sioux when he wanted you to see him.

Across the camp there was a sudden groan and Sandhurst heard the convulsive thrashing of a man's body against the hard ground. He turned his head carefully and saw Asa Meadows crawling slowly toward the sound, his black medical kit slung with a rope behind his back. Sandhurst thought briefly of their conversation the night before. A strange man, Meadows. A soldier without the glory of a uniform.

A scraping sound behind Sandhurst caused him to turn abruptly his hand reaching for the pistol at his belt. He relaxed with a sigh and felt a faint tug of irritation when he saw Dave Weaks crawling with tortuous care toward him.

"If the Indians don't kill you crawling around like that," Sandhurst said, "one of us is likely to."

Weaks drew himself up beside Sandhurst. His long, thin face was a sickly gray, his pale blue eyes now bright and glassy with fear. He took a soiled envelope from his pocket and thrust it at Sandhurst.

"I've written a letter to my wife," he said. "I'd like for you to mail it if anything happens to me."

Sandhurst had not known that Weaks was married. He took the letter and looked at the envelope. It was addressed to Mrs. Mary Weaks, Bellville, Ohio.

"Don't sit around thinking about stopping a bullet," Sandhurst told the man. "Think about the whiskey you'll drink when we get to Canyon City."

Weaks shook his head. "Not me, Mark," he said, his voice hollow in his throat. "I've got a feeling. It's what I deserve, I guess, for running out on Mary and the baby."

Sandhurst did not care to hear the sorry details of Weaks' past, but he knew that the private needed to talk. It was his only chance of getting a grip on his nerve.

"You left them to join the Army?" Sandhurst asked.

"It was tough making a living back there," Weaks said. His words came in a dull monotone. "I got tired of it. I thought I wanted excitement, so I just left one night. Didn't even tell her goodbye. She must be having an awful time making a living for herself and little Dave, too. He's three this month."

"Save your money," Sandhurst told him. "Maybe you can buy your way out of the army and go back. Make it up to them."

Weaks' pale eyes mirrored a momentary flash of hope, but it was gone almost instantly. "I might," he said. "If I could get through this day."

He turned then and crawled back toward his own position a dozen feet away. Sandhurst watched him until he had reached his rock barricade, and then he swung his eyes over to where Asa Meadows was just leaving the wounded man he had ministered to. The doctor was almost in front of Clarice Scott's tent when the bullet hit him. He gave a little grunt

of surprise, jerked upright for an instant, and then fell face down on the hard ground. He made a desperate effort to crawl to cover behind a nearby boulder but he could not move.

SANDHURST slung his carbine over his shoulder and started for Meadows. He picked his way slowly, seeking what meager protection he could find, but he had not quite reached the doctor when Clarice Scott came out of her tent. She gripped Meadows by one arm and pulled him gently but firmly toward her canvas lodging. Sandhurst saw a bullet whip the long skirt of her dress. He reached her just in time to assist briefly in lifting Meadows onto the hard cot inside the structure.

Sandhurst needed but one glance to see that the doctor was a badly injured man. His coat was torn almost completely off his right shoulder, and a sticky red mess had already soaked the cloth half way to his waist.

Sandhurst took a sharp knife from the doctor's kit and cut away the coat. Meadow's shoulder was not a pretty sight. The bullet from its downward angle had crashed through the bone and furrowed a bloody path along the soft flesh of his upper arm. Luckily, the slug had passed completely through so that no probing would be necessary.

Clarice Scott took cotton and an alcoholic disinfectant from the kit and handed them to Sandhurst. He quickly cleaned the wound and applied a clumsy tourniquet, but because of the position of the wound, it did not help much. The woman dug a long white petticoat from her traveling trunk and tore it into big squares. She folded them and soaked them with the water remaining in her canteen, then she pressed them carefully against Meadow's broken shoulder.

Sandhurst stepped back. Clarice Scott knew what she was about, he saw. The increasing din of musket fire outside the tent reached him, and he heard the cry of another wounded trooper.

"Can you handle it, Mrs. Scott?" he asked.

She nodded briefly. Her face was very white and her breath was short, but she worked with quiet efficiency. "Go back," she said. "I'll take care of him."

Sandhurst pushed the tent flap out and stepped back into the sunlight. A bullet snarled past his cheek and he flattened himself on the ground, working slowly back to his original position.

"They're getting closer," he heard Lieutenant Carstairs say calmly. "Throw up some lead whether you see anything or not. Let the devils know we're here."

Sandhurst followed the order, knowing that it was the only possible thing to do. He spaced his shots and scattered them firing at any bush or suspicious shadow he saw on the hills above. The easy kick of the gun stock against his shoulder was reassuring, and yet actually he knew that he was firing at phantoms that were not there.

The sun climbed in the heaven and grew hot. Sandhurst had no watch but he knew that he had lain there over an hour, firing carefully, watching his bullet supply, when he heard his name called. The voice seemed muffled and strangely far away, and so preoccupied was he with his shooting that he at first thought he had imagined it.

"Sandhurst!"

It came again and now he knew it was real. It was the voice of Asa Meadows and it came from the tent.

Sandhurst waited for a momentary lull in the firing and dashed for the tent. He made it a split second before a fresh barrage came crashing down from the hills. He pushed on the tent flap and stepped inside.

Somehow Meadows had gotten from the cot and now sat slumped in the small canvas camp chair. His shoulder was bandaged in white cloth and his arm hung limply across his body. Clarice Scott lay on the cot now, and her face was flushed almost to a feverish color where it had been white an hour ago. Her breathing was deep and heavy.

A tingling sensation played along Sandhurst's spine. He knew suddenly why Meadows had called him, and that knowledge robbed him momentarily of the professional calm that years of gambling had drilled into him.

"Don't stand there, man," Meadows snapped. "Take off your tunic, roll up your shirt sleeves, wash your hands from that alcohol bottle there and wash them good. You're the doctor now. I won't be able to do a damn thing but give you instructions."

Sandhurst's face felt stiff and tight. The sharp core of nervousness was growing inside him. "Why did you pick me for this?" he asked. "Why not Carstairs or one of the others?"

"Your hands," Meadows said. "I told you last night what I thought about them. It will take everything you can do with them and all the savvy I've got to pull this off right."

Sandhurst let the air dry his hands and forearms. "All right," he said, facing the doctor. "What next?"

Quietly, concisely, Meadows gave orders for making the woman ready, and Sandhurst obeyed them automatically. When he was finished his clothes were soggy with perspiration.

The doctor's voice droned on, now talking reassuringly to Clarice Scott, now throwing a crisp order to Sandhurst. It seemed but a few minutes to Sandhurst and yet he somehow knew that hours had passed before the moment came — that moment when he held in his hands an incredibly tiny bundle of human life. A girl.

A wail came from it, loud and healthy, and with that cry the wall of tension crumbled inside Sandhurst and soothing relief flooded his body. A smile broke on his lips and he looked at Asa Meadows.

"Wrap her in that clean towel and tuck her in beside her mother," Meadows directed, and added, "That was as fine a knot tying as I ever hope to see, Mark. Your fingers looked like they were turning over the last card in a thousand dollar stud poker pot!"

A few minutes later Sandhurst stepped out of the tent. He filled his lungs eagerly with the fresh, sweet air and exhaled slowly. He looked at the troopers now gathered in a group, and only then did he realize that for the past ten minutes he had heard no sound of Indian muskets or army carbines.

"It's all over," Sandhurst said. "There's a relief column from the fort twenty minutes away."

Asa Meadows nodded but he did not seem to be listening. "Mark," he asked, "how do you feel?"

Sandhurst looked at him. "Good as new," he said.

"No," the doctor said. "I mean how does it make you feel to have done something with your hands that you couldn't have done dealing cards in a thousand years?"

"It's a good feeling," Sandhurst admitted.

"You'll have to put off your desertion plans for a while," Meadows smiled. "You did such a good job that there'll be no need for Mrs. Scott to go on to Canyon City now."

"I was thinking, Mark," the doctor went on. "Before you get another chance to pull out, maybe you'll have time to change your mind. There'll be some big Indian campaigns starting this Fall. I'll need a medical aide I can count on."

Sandhurst picked up his blue tunic that he had earlier thrown on the tent floor. He put it on and went outside. He sat down on a rock at the edge of camp and watched the approaching cavalry column.

But he was not thinking about the column. He was thinking that he had lost his gamble to return to the Missouri river boats. Fate had dealt him another hand this day, and, gambler that he was, he would play it the best he could.

The army would keep a soldier. And Asa Meadows would have his medical assistant when the Sioux campaigns started in the Fall.

Sandhurst moved slightly and he heard the rustle of the five one thousand dollar bills sewed inside his tunic. He slit the lining and removed the money. From his pocket he took a letter addressed to Mrs. Mary Weaks, Bellville, Ohio. He opened it with the knife blade, dropped the bills inside, and sealed it again.

He had taken that money, a little of it, from Dave Weaks. And, anyway, what would an Army medic at a frontier outpost do with five thousand dollars?

AMBUSH ARROWS

By W. EDMUNDS CLAUSSEN

"THEY'LL LIKELY BURY some of our bones in the sand, but if that damned river can be crossed we'll make it, son," Ma Fillman said from the high seat of her Conestoga wagon.

Paul said, "We shouldn't try to make it now. Tonight, maybe tomorrow, when the flood's spent. That's the time to try."

Ma's eyes had been ashes before; fear filled. Now there was a glint behind the faded pupils. She shook her gray head on the pivot of her wrinkled neck. "Men on the trail for gold don't slow down for high water, Paul," she said.

"But there's womanfolk along. People like you Fillmans—who didn't start for gold and shouldn't have slim chances shoved them in the face."

"We're game to try. The ways of the Lord are almighty strange and maybe He'll see us through. Get in front now, son, where you'll likely be needed."

Paul Beihl nodded and sauntered past the stalled Conestogas with down-thrust head. People cast insinuating glances through the corners of their eyes. People who had been his friends since they jumped off from Independence and fought through the back-breaking wilderness clean to Fort Laramie. Westward of Laramie things had been different. Nerves were strung taut by the endless labors of the prairie. Some had stopped calling him *Capt'n* Beihl. Some had fronted him openly with rebellion in their embittered

eyes. What stung by far the hardest was Sue Courtney's attitude.

Only three or four men in the caravan of 49ers knew the truth about her father. Gordon Courtney had started West with nine to ten thousand dollars in twenty dollar gold planked between his wagon. On the top of this precious cargo sat his daughter, wielding the reins of their mule teams, singing, laughing, the sunlight catching highlights in her golden hair. It rankled Paul that Buff Harmon, their new guide, had caught the glint from each source and was hard on the scent of both. If they could have guessed beyond the Sweetwater without hitching onto Buff Harmon . . .

The parked camp was stirring with excitement. Men were still lashing freshly felled timber fast to their wagon beds. Even above the rattle of chains and braying of mules Beihl could hear the frightful roar of Green River. It brought to his mind anew how Ma Fillman's face had blanched when they first halted by the river bank. Blanched white as the sacks of flour they had spilled to lighten their loads the other side of Laramie.

This river crossing had been the climax of their insane lashing forward at the miles that still stood between them and the gold coast. He had been against their immediate crossing from the start, had counseled waiting until the flood had passed. No, Buff Harmon had pressed the issue. Words had led to angry threats and these to blows. The scout's hand had dropped to his cap-and-ball Colt dangling from his battered belt before Paul's fist had clubbed into his scowling jaw and knocked Buff flat.

But to the ignorant, gold crazed wagoners Buff Harmon in his greasy buckskins and scraggly beard could never be wrong. His tall tales of the mountains held them agog. The wagon train had elected to cross against Paul's advice.

He came within sight of the angry river.

Three lumbering wagons were being lowered on taut ropes and into the racing torrent, extra hitches of mules hedging uncertainly at the brink. Long tongues of leather were making up their minds for them. Buff Harmon had not even waited for his return but had taken this crossing into his own hands. And in this, Paul saw that he was no longer captain.

"Well, my friend, they've started crossing," came a chiding voice from above. "Fortunate, isn't it that we have *some* brave men along."

That remark was unkind and unwarranted. He turned his head to look at her. A week ago his heart would have leaped with joy to see her so, the morning sunlight splashing through the wagon's open arch and picking out the softness of her chestnut hair. Now he looked beyond the fresh loveliness of her face and saw instead Ma Fillman's lined features, the stringy hands tugging at her long lead reins. He heard the pitiful groans of Jake Fillman rocking inside the wagon, the raw arrow-shaft welts still open on his chest and back. Paul shook his head to clear his brain.

"Yeah, Buff's brave all right," Paul said quietly. "But danged rash, Sue. For the womenfolk along that running water out there is going to be—just about hell!"

"They're all pioneers, those women you worry about. They're anxious to get along West—so their menfolk will be first to the goldfields. There's no white feathers on *us!*"

Paul said nothing. His mind was still running backward, thinking of the nights on the prairie when she had danced, pressed against his chest, while the fiddler played by the light of the moon. Paul's long, hard fingers slipped absently up and down the blade of his Green River knife, his eyes squinting against the reflections on the water, watching breathlessly the rocking wagon bows whipping in the current. The first wagon was already in swimming water.

ABRUPTLY his head swung up to meet her stare. "Sue! Sue!" It was as though he could stand her indifference no longer, and his voice was charged with an impassioned pleading. "We can't go on like this. You've got to change about me."

Her eyes turned to the bobbing canvas midway in the stream. Her voice was chill as the streams on frosty mornings. "What went on that took you to the back of the line? Isn't your place up front—with the leaders?"

No need to answer such a question. The whole camp knew how he had chopped logs all night to help float the wagons across. How he had worked like a darky preparing the banks for this crossing. How he had planned with Cedric Coombs and her father until his head was whirling. No need bother to tell her how at the last moment he had walked to the rear of the column for a short talk with Jake Fillman and to put some color back into Ma's starchy face.

"Look!" the girl cried. "It's happened! Spicer's mules are tangled. They'll all be drowned!"

They could only watch while Spicer's lead team tried pawing its way over a floating log. The long trunk swung about in an eddy of current. It struck the madly bobbing Pittsburgh and sloshed it over on its side. Jesse Spicer leaped from his seat and splashed for a moment beside his mules. And then the dark dot that was his head disappeared. The good woman inside never showed above the soggy canvas.

Sue's voice was a hard thing to hear. It would haunt him every last day he lived. "If you had been where you belonged this thing might not have happened!"

Paul's legs were already thrashing beyond the high wheels of her Conestoga, carrying him beyond the agonizing condemnation written in her face.

THE UGLY ROAR of Green River sounded like a cascade, sucking and folding every floating thing into itself. He saw men running the length of the bank calling to each other and swinging ropes in aimless confusion. Harmon in his buckskin suit, an arm outflung, was bellowing orders with his obtrusive mouth.

His own hoop-tilted wagon stood on the slant at the water's edge. Jeb Miller faced

him from the seat, tight-lipped, face drawn. Paul's mind leaped in instant decision. He gave a spring to the seat and grappled the reins from the boy's yielding fingers.

"Quick, onto Brimstone!" he yelled into Jeb's ear. He had himself intended to swim the horse tethered to the tall wheel, circumstances now altered all his plans. "Get into the water with you! Hurry Stay upstream and don't let him drift close by the wagon!"

The kid untied the reins and hoisted himself into the saddle of the big bay. A glance showed that of the wagons remaining in the water one was still held by the grip of the current, floundering badly. The forward animals of the other had touched firm bottom with their feet and were hauling their water-logged burden shoreward.

Paul lashed the mules with everything his arm could give them and they had never felt that kind of leather. They bucked out blindly, shrieking, almost running for the river. The leads were swimming, then the swing-span and the wheelers. The current tore away at the cumbersome wagon body and sucked it downstream. Sweat stood on Paul's forehead. Only the last drop of energy in the faithful animals' bodies could see them through now.

He realized as he ceased tooling the swimming spans and let them have their heads that in this move he had displayed a certain amount of insane bravado, driven into him by the scorching words of Sue Courtney. They had asked for this, demanded it. Well then, let them take it and like it!

Deeper than this, he realized, lay the immediate need for concerted action to rally the demoralized caravan and galvanize them into completing their crossing. Left to the leadership of the hotheads screaming up and down the bank the train might have lain inert, bickering, with half their animals and wagons on either side.

Part way over he caught his first glimpse of Jeb riding low in the roily water. Back home Jeb had been a neighbor's youngest son. He had been spoiling for the long trek and Paul had taken the kid along to drive. There was a white, pinched look now on the youngster's face. But the lad was pure grit. He sat quietly in the saddle letting Brimstone fight his own battle with the current. That bay was a good swimmer, a gelding foaled from good Kentucky strain.

Far downstream the wet canvas of another wagon was bobbing, mules pulling ineffectively against the sucking swells. He fancied he detected a hand-wave from the seat. He bent closer. Old Cedric Coombs, hair white as a mountain hermit, sitting nervelessly with his boots propped against the footboards!

"Hello, you old chuckle-head!" Paul bellowed across the swirls. "Lay onto their tail ends with a piece of whip-leather!"

The answer came back against the background of the water; an old man's voice still packed with plenty of spirit. "Cut skyhootin', you young jughead. I'll whip you across yet!"

The spell was broken. Even the mules sensed it. Paul could see a wake following Coombs' waterlogged rig. His own heavily timbered craft tossed again and came up against the hind legs of his wheelers. For a long moment it hung there and he felt the thrash of the hoovers against his footboard. Then the mules broke free and the forward team struck gravel with their forefeet. They crawled out resembling an exhausted, dripping serpent.

Paul drove well onto the solid soil to leave room for the wagons to follow. Then he turned broadside to the river. Upstream a long line of prairie schooners were curving with the current, following his example. Satisfaction welled through him. He counted them. Sixteen—that meant Ma Fillman had dipped her leads into the water. Inside the bows crippled Jake Fillman would be rocking with the current, biting his pain. His plucky, pioneer woman had what it took!

Downstream, Coombs' team was laboring out onto a shelf. Jeb Miller drove into his line of vision, still pale around the cheeks and quaking like an aspen. Beihl smiled thinly. "How was your ride, kid?"

"Sure was a huckleberry, wasn't she?"

Paul's face sobered. He said crisply, "There's a little chore that needs doin' before the others pull out of that river. Somewhere west of here is Bridger's Post.

Reckon I can't tell you how it's to be found, and there's Crows in every hole. But if you head south for a spell you'll cut the sign of the main crossings. Follow them west thirty, maybe forty miles. Think you can make it?"

"When I get there what do I say to Mister Bridger?"

"Ask Jim Bridger did he ever hear of a gent who calls himself Buff Harmon? Or that slippery partner Vance Lacy who lit out three days ago. When you ride back you'll find us on yonder a piece. Have you got everything straight?"

"Yes sir," Jeb's eyes were glowing. "I'll more'n likely bring word back that'll make Harmon's jaw sag, Capt'n Beihl!"

"Then ride, Jeb, ride!"

The kid was gone in a mushrooming cloud of dust.

Paul saw something white floating in the water just beyond shoreline. While he watched he saw it catch among the twisted tree limbs standing over the racing water. He leaped down from his wagon seat and ran forward in long strides. He meant to reach that thing before it broke loose and carried beyond the bend. It was the canvas of Jesse Spicer's wagon.

WHILE HE RAN Paul's mind was still playing over the mission on which he had sent Jeb. In this he was acting purely on a hunch. He had made up his mind long ago to check this swaggering scout and his handsome pal the caravan had adopted. Within the shadow of Devil's Gate their first scout had died of Cheyenne arrows, the same brand that had laid Jake Fillman low in his wagon bed. Buff Harmon and Vance Lacy had trailed in from South Pass and the west even while the train's leaders were met in council. The pair had agreed to guide the caravan west as far as Black Fork, sullenly at first, Beihl thought.

Then their attitude changed. Of a sudden Buff was all for getting this train westward after the gold. He had championed Hasting's cut-off through Weber Canyon in the Wasatch when their original plans had called for the Bear River Trail. Mild mannered Courtney had been impressed by the time saving, had backed the glib-tongued, new pathfinder to the limit. Save three weeks! The same gifted arguments at the river crossing. Before they had reached Green River Vance Lacy had been sent forward on some secret mission and thus far Harmon had been close-mouthed about its purpose. Too close-mouthed Paul thought. The more he dwelt on it the more he realized that in sending Jeb to Bridger's Post he had acted wisely.

The Spicer rig was a scene of devastation. Three mules out of six still breathed, although in terrible agony. Paul's dragoon pistol came into his hand and he slipped a ball between each pair of glazed eyes. Then he climbed out on what was left of the splintered wagon tongue. The canvas was torn and floating down stream. He slit a fresh gap with his belt knife and, reaching through the opening, drew forth the limp woman.

She had been dead since they first overturned. He could tell by her face that comprehension had never fully dawned of what was happening. Nevertheless, the stark look of her features offered somber evidence of the horror she must have held for this river crossing. He lifted this grim burden and with it pressed tightly against his chest he back-tracked the narrow, rickety tongue and then laid it carefully on the sands.

"I brought this along," a heavy voice said at his side.

Coombs waited with a folded blanket across his arm. "Her man lies yonderly, by my wagon. We'll fetch him later," Coombs said and stroked the flowing brush of his white beard.

Beihl straightened. In taciturn mood, he stalked to the hoop-tilted wagons gathered on the bank. The Missourian trudged at his heels.

"This'll make it bad," his voice droned against the constant crashing of the river. "They'll be madder than molested hornets. They'll want to skin your carcass for this."

"Was none of my doing," Beihl said curtly.

"But you're the capt'n. "You're the one . . . "

Beihl spun on one boot. "You're stubborn as the rest! I fought you all alone

this morning so this thing wouldn't happen. They elected a new captain when the first wagon hit the water!"

Coombs shook his head dubiously. "This crowd won't look at it that way. They're spoiling to give somebody hell. So long you haven't been officially told you're no longer captain they'll pick on you to give it to."

Beihl walked thoughtfully beside his white haired friend. Coombs had been his closest neighbor and counselor these twenty odd years. What chance had a man when even his friends were blind? Beihl stiffened inside; he made up his mind he would accept nobody's condemnation.

They could hear voices coming from within the wagon circle. A fire was being kindled by which to dry clothing and bedding. Cedric's step lagged. "I've been aiming to talk before this, son," he said quietly. "You don't take too well to Buckskin, I can see that. It's on your mind he's found out about Gordon's gold?"

Paul's eyes held straight ahead. They had picked out the shapely figure of Sue Courtney within the wagon park. His thoughts were his own, but something of them was manifesting itself in the boxed lines about his tight lips. "Harmon's after both kinds of gold," he said icily.

"And if Gordon's such a confounded fool not to see it, are we Missourians to sit by and let Buckskin get it?"

Paul barely turned his head. "Yonder comes Harmon now."

The scout broke through the wagon circle and stalked up to meet them. Paul's eyes tore the mask from Harmon's malignant face and he didn't like what he found behind this. The scout was impersonal as chilled steel. "The leaders are waitin' to see you, Capt'n."

Paul nodded. "First, Harmon, I've got a question of my own to ask. What happened to Lacy?"

"I sent him to Bridger's Post. What's it to you?"

"Why Bridger's Post?"

"When Vance and me came through from Salt Lake Jim Bridger was making up a hunting party. I want Vance to get there before Jim leaves and have him sketch the best route for wagons through Weber Canyon. If you got anything else on your mind, suppose you say it in front of the leaders."

"There's nothing else," Paul said. "nothing at all."

He turned on his heel and made for the encampment. He didn't believe Lacy had gone to Bridger's. He would have to wait until Jeb returned before he could throw the lie into Harmon's teeth.

ALREADY the wagoners had their fire crackling inside the wagon enclosure. Men were unlashing the logs from undercarriages and lifting armloads of goods from the tailgates of their wet wagons. Gordon Courtney, Doctor Phillips, young, red-headed Spratt were there. All were pacing impatiently, obviously ill at ease and anxious to have this council under way. As Paul stepped to the fire a big hand found his shoulder and he felt Cedric's bristly beard scrape his ear. "Don't let 'em get you rattled, son," old Cedric said.

"You sent for me, gentlemen?" Paul demanded.

Doc Phillips apparently had been made spokesman. He drew himself to full height, looking severe over his iron-rimmed spectacles. "Capt'n Paul, you made freighting trips to Santa Fe during the three seasons immediately preceding this year?"

Paul faced him squarely. "You know that, Doc," he said. From the corner of his eye he glimpsed Sue separating wet corn meal. "You saw me pull out from Independence yourself. Where is this supposed to lead us?"

"The charge has been made that on your last trip your men raided a smaller caravan and stole their mules in order to carry you over the Dry Crossing. It has been said the smaller caravan was left in dire circumstance."

"For shame, Asa Phillips!" chided the white haired Coombs. "For shame that one Missouri man should speak so to another!"

The bronze of the captain's face had blanched to his very hair roots. "I'd like to know who told such tales."

"That we are not prepared to disclose."

"Then there'll be no explanations," Paul

said. His voice was kindling a steady heat.

The red head opened his mouth. "This here is showdown, Beihl. We-all seen you was afraid to cross that river. Vance Lacy told us how you was afraid on the desert, the time you switched to fresh mules."

Capt'n Beihl's lips were a straight line across his face. "Vance Lacy lies. When he gets back I'll throw the lie in his face."

Gordon Courtney spoke. "You realize, of course, how serious this lack of leadership had become. Yonder lies Jesse Spicer's wagon—what's left of him and his family. God alone knows it could have happened to my own daughter."

Beihl said softly, "I didn't order the crossing. It was like fighting blind men." He could feel Cedric's fingers gripping his arm and he shrugged indifferently. "You admit now we shouldn't have crossed. Go on from there, Gordon."

Courtney's head shook, a little wistfully. "Under the circumstances the train must be guided from here by a council of leaders."

"A council of leaders taking advice from your new squaw-man," Paul said acidly. He looked from one to another of the men facing him and Courtney's eyes cast to the ground and his silence gave eloquent answer. Beihl hooked his thumbs through his belt and drew erect. "You don't have to tell me I'm no longer capt'n," he said. "I've known it quite a spell. When you're all ready you can pull out in front and I'll drag along behind."

Cedric Coombs cut in, a scientific bitterness to his words. "*All* the Waverly wagons will be back there with the cavvyard. It'll smell—but not *this* bad!"

The old man's fingers tightened on Paul's arm and together they turned and stalked toward their own camp. They passed Sue and the womenfolk along the way. Unexpectedly Paul caught the sparkle of sun beneath each eye as she turned her head. This quarrel with her father had brought the tears to her cheek. His own breast felt like a charred firepot.

All that day the park shuttled about drying their gear and making necessary repairs. Blankets and bedding hung from lines stretched between wagons. Men who rode mules and had no belongings chafed over the delay and grew ill tempered with those who held them back. Yet none would risk the dangerous alternative of riding ahead through Indian infested country. Darkness came and the fires still blazed and plumes of red colored the opaqueness of night. Coombs threw Paul a knowing look.

"Nothing at all like letting the painted varmints know where you're at!" the old man crowed.

Ma had driven the Fillman wagon between these other two. From now on the Waverly contingent would remain apart and lap up the dust from the remainder of the column. There was no longer music about the fires; the ceaseless plains had finished that. Men sat in black shadows and themselves sank into black moods.

Toward midnight Ma sent for Paul. Her husband was racking with pain and Doc Phillips stood looking on helplessly. By the light of a lantern swung in the bows, Paul saw that the lips of the wounded man were again filmed with blood. Long sobs escaped each time his lungs filled themselves.

"There's no laudanum left," Asa Phillips said hopelessly. Jake's head lay in ma's lap and she sat stroking the tousled hair.

Paul nodded. The Indian fight before Devil's Gate had used up their meager stock of drugs. He said quietly. "Chill a towel in river water."

Jake lifted a thin hand. "Never mind, Ma," he whispered. "Ain't much use anymore. Save your energy, you-all are gonna need it."

He lay still a time until his energy rebuilt. "Tell me, Capt'n Paul, is it true you drove your fist into that squaw-man's ornery face this forenoon?" He lay back as Paul nodded, a half-smile curling the edges of his stained lips. His eyelids fluttered. "It's sure a shameful thing there wasn't an axe handle between your fingers!"

When death relieved Jake of his agony, they had to force Ma away from the lifeless form while they covered him with a blanket. In the morning Beihl would dig a grave ahead on the trail where the wheels of the entire caravan could pack it down.

He sauntered now to his own rig, fighting his pensive mood. He knew full well the rocking of Ma's craft in the river had opened Jake wounds inwardly and hastened his end.

He stood by the side of his own wagon and packed the white clay bowl of his pipe with ripe burley. The stars were arching across the black dome of the sky and filling its emptiness. Then his eyes wandered ahead toward the Courtney camp, as they always did.

Gordon was still planning with Spratt and Muir. Harmon was there also, leaning against the tailgate of Courtney's wagon. The firelight was dancing and painting their russet faces. Paul looked closer. In the background, partly hidden by the canvas, he made out Sue. He knocked the heel from his pipe and stepped with his boot, killing the fire. He drew aside the blankets of his bed. The night would be silent tonight, and long.

IN THE MORNING they clanked on their way while the mists were still clinging to the ground. Those who had grumbled of the delay yesterday grumbled anew of the fresh series of rounded humps that seemed to grow up out of the sand and had to be crossed.

Buff Harmon had slapped a saddle on his rangy plains horse early in the morning and was out somewhere scouting ahead. This was a relief to the Waverly contingent; for the other wagons it added immeasurable suspense to the morning.

Smoke signals had shown on either flank so often these past weeks they took them with the day's work. Yet today the rising columns appeared to take on special, ominous meaning. A hickory-sleeved arm thrust from the lead wagons, pointing toward the sweeping hills. The anxious cry of "Redskins!" soon followed and swept through the wagons.

At times the soil was sandy and men put their hands to the tall wheels and strained their backs lifting the wagons through the deep, sticky spots. Sand carried up with the rims and ran down from the felloes in cascades. Paul now had two wagons on his hands; he spent more time aiding Ma Fillman's mules moving her lumbering craft to the crest of each hill than he spent with his own wagon. From each ridge-top he cast expectant glances westward. Jim Bridger's Post must lie somewhere beyond.

Once Doc Phillips called him to the head of the train to ask curtly what had become of Jeb. Paul grinned sardonically. "Reckon maybe the kid rode on a piece. Brimstone wasn't with the cavvy."

The doctor cussed him roundly, declaring Beihl ought to be horsewhipped for letting any man ride alone through the Indian infested sloughs. Paul's answering laugh made Phillips purse his lips. But he decided not to press the issue. Barring unexpected ambush, any good rider would be safe in Brimstone's saddle. On his return to the rear a hard-lipped teamster called his aid at Courtney's mired-down wagon. Sue was out of the wagon herself, dividing her energy between lashing her mules and shoving against the great wheels. After they had regained a hard length of trail Beihl turned to go.

"Don't leave, Paul," her voice called him, uncertainly. The red crept up painting each cheek and her eyes had dropped. He was forced to turn his head from her loveliness. "I—just want you to know I'm no longer angry with you."

"Thanks, ma'am. It's a little late, but good to know."

"You aren't mad with me, Paul?"

He recalled the plea that had welled out from him yesterday; his last futile attempt to draw her closer to him when it seemed she was building her impassible barrier. "No," he answered softly. His chest felt like cold stone from which all hope and faith had ebbed. "I'm not mad, Sue. Not mad that way."

"Then, if the redskins come, you'll bring your wagon next to mine? We'll fight side by side like we did the last time?"

"If it happens that way I reckon your pappy's friend will be hanging close by. It's no use, Sue. If I tangle with Buff again only one of us will come out of it alive."

He was conscious of her deep, quick intake of breath. She seemed about to call him back. A small hand had leaped up to press against her breast. He had

meant it, he told himself stubbornly. There was proud, red blood surging through his veins—the Beihls of Waverly had their pride, too.

THEY NOONED without water in a vast, copper colored basin and let their thirsty stock lap of river water in their pails. Two o'clock Gordon Courtney's cry of "Catch up!" echoed through the messes and the columns once more were trudging westward. Still the feeling of Indians crowding every elbow.

Shortly afterwards, it happened. The leaders saw Buff topping a rise and come pounding down toward them. One look at his running pony hugging the ground and Courtney wheeled. "Corral!" he roared.

They had done this thing before, ever since the jump-off, in anticipation of an attack. But the strain now of racing against time set every man's nerves on edge. The two columns swung wide and began to form their circle. Already the loose stock was pouring inside. Long whips cracked like pistols over mules that shrieked their fear and strained with every muscle. Wagons bogged down that had either to be lifted loose or abandoned. Then they came. A long line of dark figures stretching across the rim of the basin, their naked bodies glinting in the sun.

Paul was last to fill the gap. His keen eyes picked out a lone horseman riding out in front. Gordon Courtney stood beside the opening, a breech loader in his hands. "Fill in the gap!" Gordon yelled hoarsely. "Fill her in, man!"

Instead, Paul braced his boots and pulled with all his power to hold back the frightened mules. From the corner of his eye he could see the figure in buckskin leap over an empty wagon tongue.

"What you trying to do?" Buff snapped angrily. "Pull that rig in quick!"

Paul's answer was directed at Courtney. "One of my men coming." he said.

Buff's hand fell to his cap-and-ball. He snarled like an animal, "When I give an order you jump, fella!"

Paul found himself staring into the scout's Colt. He ignored the menace of its dark muzzle and looked instead across the rolling grass. Fifty yards away he could see Jeb digging his heels into Brimstone. Behind the sweat-dripping bay there came a wall of plunging Indian ponies. And then he heard the spiteful crack of Harmon's weapon. He was only half conscious that Courtney had leaped against the scout's arm to spoil his aim. Then the youth had entered, and Paul lashed his fear crazed mules into the opening.

Already the wagon park was popping with rifles. Men lay beneath their wheels firing as fast as they could feed the charges. There was no time to unhitch the mules. Paul flung himself inside the wagon box and thrust the barrel of his Hawkins across the seat.

From underneath the wagon he could hear the roar of Gordon's breech loader. The first attempt of the savages would be meant to feel their strength. They came within a hundred yards, circling the park and giving it a taste of arrows. Then they withdrew in ever-widening circles. When they were gone behind the hills Paul jumped to the ground.

Buff had been shooting from behind a neighboring Pittsburgh. Paul sought him out and faced him squarely. "When this here's over, you and I will face each other —man to man!"

Paul turned away and walked to Jeb, standing by the bridle of the heaving Brimstone. His eyes took in the saddle horn splintered by a bullet, the Crow war bonnet lashed to the shirts. The kid's face had paled to the color of alkali.

"I'm right proud of you, Jeb," Paul said. "You got your first redskin!" He saw the color flush to Jeb's face. "What other news, speak up!"

The youngster let his eyes wander first to Courtney, then to Buff Harmon before he brought them back to Paul. His tongue licked out nervously to wet his parched lips. "Jim Bridger saw the smoke. He knows the devils are up to something. Said he'll raise a parcel of men and ride with help."

"Splendid!" cried Courtney.

"Only—he's not in any all-fired hurry. He reckoned any caravan that was being scouted by Buff Harmon wasn't in any

likely danger from Injuns!"

Beihl took the full impact of the words. He let them sink in and go around in his head and then he stepped to the boy and gripped his shoulders, staring all the while into the lad's face with his unbelieving eyes. "Say that again, Jeb. Jim Bridger knows this Buff?"

Jeb nodded. "He reckons him the best scout this side of the mountains."

Paul walked slowly toward his wagon. Behind he could hear Harmon's empty mouthings. Something was decidedly wrong here. Jim Bridger, old mountain man and hard judge of men and horses, never meant *this* Buff Harmon. A cold feeling had come to Paul's hands.

Out across the brown swells the circle of racing ponies began once more to close in on the park. From the arrow struck Pittsburgh at the left Cedric Coombs shouted. "Here they come, boys! Give it to them!"

Paul stuck his brass bound Hawkins through the spokes. *Let them come and be damned,* he thought.

THE SOUNDS of rent sheeting and strapiron heads sinking into hickory wagon frames was terrible. Some Crows discharged their bows upward, their shafts traveling a long arc and coming down within the park. Mules and horses already lay in blood within the enclosure. The womenfolk ran back and forth carrying pails of river water, ready for the worst.

The Crow warriors of the inner circle hid behind the off side of their racing ponies, twanging their bows from under their mount's neck. They came in savage paint and feathers, shouting their war cries and fighting with a diabolical fury, bent on making their victory complete.

The men of the train fought artfully, shooting as often as they could ram home their charges of powder and lead. Still the red warriors kept coming. Occasionally a pain crazed mule charged into a wagon, threatening to upset their barricade.

"Look yonder!" Cedric Coombs screamed above the tumult.

Paul allowed his eyes to drift. Already half the wagons on their side were burning The women were working like beaver to extinguish the burning arrows before they could spread into serious proportions. Presently there was no wagon on their side of the park with out its burned out sheeting. Beihl could hear Cedric's sarcastic crackle.

"Strike you peculiar the red-bellied varmints ain't sending any burning arrows into Courtney's wagon?" He cocked one eye and made a long face.

Paul became aware of Jeb crouched by his side. The kid was shooting with a gusto. Paul's own rifle was hot when he laid it aside to draw his Colt. A redskin came charging straight into his line of fire. There was something vaguely familiar about the warrior. Somehow a strange feeling of shock took Paul and held his finger. Then the redskin fell in beside his plumed chief and together they disappeared beyond the perimeter.

The feeling persisted within Paul. He realized he could have killed the brave easily, if he had wanted to. Why had he spared an enemy's life? In that fraction of time when his finger lay on his trigger a picture of someone he had known leaped against the edge of his reasoning. While he lay there brooding an arrow struck the white-oak wheel behind which he forted. There was a splintering sensation, then stillness.

When Paul awoke, he lay in the center of the park beside others of the train all covered by blankets. Darkness had fallen; a blackness unalleviated by any light other than the stars. He could hear men and mules groaning. When he attempted to climb to his feet Jeb Miller appeared.

"Steady, Capt'n Paul," the kid whispered, "steady does it!"

It all returned to him vividly. The Indian with the familiar features, his not firing when he could have felled an enemy. Abruptly he turned to Jeb. "What you said about Bridger was downright curious, lad. And what happened to Lacy?"

"I didn't see Lacy on the ride, but Jim Bridger swore sure-fire by Buff. Reckon I feel like you do about that bummer, Capt'n Paul," the youngster said. His gaze ran furtively up and down the park. "Guess you thought Buff was trying to kill you that time he fired when I raced

in. He was aimin' at me, Capt'n Paul. Fact is, he shot the horn off your saddle. I'd been dead crow sure if it hadn't been for Mister Courtney!"

Paul puzzled through this thing. The scout, then, must have feared Jeb Miller was riding in with news from Bridger's Post not to his liking. But what was it that lay on Buff's conscience, and where had Lacy gone? The angular faced redskin floated again before Paul's uncertain vision and then he realized Lacy and this Crow warrior were one and the same.

Jeb was still telling of the fight; how the braves had wearied of the white man's medicine and had retreated for the time being. "But they're still out there waitin'," he added soberly. "Miss Sue says they've got the water—and we ain't. We used every last drop putting out the fires. My mouth feels wors'n cotton. Tomorrow I guess it's huckleberries."

Paul's hand slipped down and felt about the edge of his belt. Knife and pistol were still cased there. His hand reached out to find the youngster. "How bad hurt am I lad?" he asked.

"Just knocked out I reckon. Miss Sue worked on you fast as I dragged you out and after she had you washed off she stopped being nervous and she told me she reckoned you'd live. Cripes! Capt'n Paul, she made me promise I'd never tell about her fixin' you up!"

"That's all right, lad,—about Miss Sue. I'll never let her know you told me." Paul sank to his blanket and closed his eyes. His head was madly spinning and yet he realized his strength was coming back. All the while he rested his brain was running forward. He spoke in a low whisper.

"Now look here, Jeb, if I fall asleep you wake me two hours before the dawn. Don't let me down or you'll be lettin' Miss Sue down too. Have some charcoal sticks ready when you wake me, and then we'll see if we can't pull a sandy on this here Buff Harmon."

WIDE-EYED Jeb Miller watched Paul lay charcoal to his bare upper torso. His idol appeared literally to melt into the vague starlight. "You—you ain't going out there alone?" Jeb gaped.

"Lad, I'm leaving a bigger job for you. Watch under Miss Sue's wagon and don't let the red devils live who come in range!"

There was a shallow slough running in a tangent from the wagon park. Paul reached for his brass-mounted Hawkins and disappeared between the wagons. He traveled low to the ground to avoid discovery by their own sentries as well as to escape watchful Indian eyes. Jeb stared incredulously into the velvet curtain. His young head shook soberly. "To think what a man has to go through for a woman," he philosophized. "Plague take 'em all!"

What Paul found out there set him back on his heels. There were two armed camps waiting for the night to break. A mile west he found the camp of white men. He filled his clay pipe and lay back sucking with the cold bit between his teeth. These, he concluded, would be Jim Bridger's men, laying ambush now and waiting for the redskins to strike.

A long time later he was circling the war camp of the Crows. It lay in a shallow glen behind a motte of trees and surrounded by rolling hummocks each of which held its red sentry. Beside Paul's Colt a gory tomahawk now hung from his belt, grim trophy of his first, silent encounter.

Since this was a war party, the camp held few lodges and no squaws. It was overrun with dogs and their constant yapping added a fitting background for the primitive warsongs of the braves circling round the fire. The camp was springing to feverish life, suggesting to Paul that the wagon park could expect another attack with the crack of dawn.

He entertained an idea Lacy would be camped apart from his redskin cohorts. For the greater part of an hour he had detoured about the site, worming from grass clump to tiny hillock. Now he stood at last over the thing he sought. Before him lay a redskin sleeping with his head, rather than his feet, stretched toward the black remains of a fire, in the manner of a white man.

He hunkered quickly down before the figure roused. His pointed blade dug into the soft flesh of the man's throat and wakened him. Paul knew then his hunch

had been correct. The first sound was a grunt and a few muffled words of the white tongue. The pointed knife quickly silenced that.

"Your choice, friend Vance," Paul said softly, "a rope when we reach the wagon park, or the knife in your windpipe now if you make another sound. I don't give a dang which!"

Lacy lay still, considering. The knife point hastened his decision and he signified his willingness to return to camp without delay.

It took a long while for Paul to worm his prisoner through the Crow sentries. The sky was brightening when they reached the hoop-tilted circle. Sight of the red and blue Conestogas brought desperation to Lacy. A few yards from the wagon wall he flashed a knife that somehow had remained hidden despite Paul's search.

The blade glinted through the graying dawn. Paul threw himself to one side and felt the cold steel pierce his shoulder. Only his agility had saved his life. In the same instant his cap-and-ball cracked. Lacy fell to the short grass face foremost. Stooping, Paul threw him across his black-smeared shoulder and ran for the park yelling his own name so not to be shot by their own sentries.

"Lookee, I've brought you a present," he jibed them.

Against the gathering he discovered Sue Courtney garbed in snowy white. On either side were Jeb Miller and her father. Off to one side stood the buckskin scout, glaring.

Gordon Courtney drew himself to the full height of dignity. "Look here, Beihl," he huffed, "all this tomfoolery for one painted devil!"

"The man's gone in the noodle sure," a wagoneer cackled.

Paul chuckled. "Look again, gentlemen. Don't this crowbait strike you-all like someone we know. Put back his stringy beard. Don't you remember him eating our grub at our own campfires?"

He heard Gordon's fierce breath and caught his faltering, backward step. "Good Lord man, yes! Weren't for the red and I'd seen it much sooner. May the good God save us for blundering fools, the man is Lacy!"

"Redskins!" shouted a sentry, "Here comes the red varmints!"

"Careful of your fire! There's white men out there!" Paul yelled a warning.

Men ran helter-skelter searching a safe barricade through which to thrust a long barrel. In the mad melee dozens of arrows entered the enclosure and again the cries of men and mules mingled in the air. Then Doctor Phillip's warning ran through the park.

"Hold your fire. White men!"

Under the murderous cross fire from two sectors the single file of naked warriors wilted. They withdrew in haste across the swells with the hot barrels of wagoneer's guns giving them a last taste of white man's lead. Shouts went up when white men entered the flats before the wagons.

Jim Bridger rode up on a gray charger, flanked on either side by long bearded old trappers. A dozen eager hands rolled aside a Conestoga so he and his company might enter. He seemed puzzled as he rode in, and his sharp old eyes darted from side to side. He apparently held no thoughts of stepping down off his gray, for he rode idly up and down the encampment noting the burned-out Osnaburg sheeting, the stock with lolling tongues. In disgust he turned finally to the wagoneers.

"Now old Jim has saw it all," he roared. "Whar the devil is Buff? That old jackass musta lost his head!"

Courtney took a short step forward, and a worried look was stretching his brows. "What is it that upsets you? Jim Bridger, you saved our lives!"

"Upset me? Listen to the crazy loon! Do'ee know a scant quarter of a mile yonderly a man can dig to water inside of two feet? And he asks me what's wrong? Old Buff never got you holed up here—elsewise the St. Louie likker you got kegged in your wagons war too much for an old man's beard!"

Doc Phillips pointed with a thin finger, "There's Buff Harmon . . ."

"Happens I still can't see the critter," Jim's eyes were slitted against the morning light.

Voodoo!

Strange new adventures in the teeming land of tomtom terror and savage intrigue await you in every exciting issue of JUNGLE STORIES. Your spine will tingle as you read these stirring tales of fast action set amid the brooding kraals and danger-ridden brush of darkest Africa! You will meet Ki-Gor, great White Lord of the Jungle, and his lovely blonde mate, Helene — and share with them the dangers and thrills of stalking beasts of prey, of conquering the weird powers of unearthly witch doctors, of living wildly in this strange and primitive veldt!

On Sale at
Your Newsstand

JUNGLE STORIES

Paul was watching the buckskin scout closely, and as Bridger's words fell upon the air Buff reached and filled his hand with his Walker Colt. Paul drove for his weapon but even as he did the thought hammered through his head that he would be too late. Then came the lingering crash of a breech loader. The scout sagged about his middle, hung in air for a space, buckled suddenly at his knees and slipped to the earth. Jeb Miller strode forward holding his smoking rifle.

"Reckon you saved my life, lad," Bridger said. He spat contemptuously over the side of his gray horse. "If any critter lets such varmint pass itself off as Buff Harmon he deserves to drink dry sand! That squaw-man was just a scoundrel hoss thief from Fort Hall way. Too bad the lad has finished him. Do'ee know I would'ave liked to see the bugger kick his legs from yonder wagon tongue!"

The three women had caught Sue Courtney when she fell and carried her to her wagon. Ma Fillman came now to tell Paul. It seemed her task to guide him as they crossed to the Courtney wagon. She wiped at a tear with the corner of her nightgown. There was something about a tall man's trembling could make a woman sob.

The others backed away leaving them together. Sue looked so wan and weak lying on her white, feminine bed. He bent low to look at her under the lantern glow. Her eyes opened, and she stifled a cry ready to slip past her pale lips.

"Oh Paul, Paul!" she said. "They've crippled you, too."

"In the shoulder, ma'am," he cast it off indifferently. "And you?"

"The shoulder too. We'll make a pair, Paul. When we get old we'll both feel the weather in our old Indian wounds. Paul dear, bend closer so I can kiss your face."

"But you said . . ." he muttered. "I thought . . . "

"Don't think, Paul. Don't ever think. Because no man's logic ever thought out a woman's whims. Just stay close by me here—and let me feel your hand."

The gun danced in Jeff's hand, giving him a savage feeling of satisfaction.

GUN WHIP LAW

By JACK ANDERSON

Bullets were ballots for law and order when young Jeff Hacknew tried to enact a new brand of gun-blazing justice for the down-trodden nesters.

JEFF HACKNEW sucked nervously at a cold, bitter cigar, his ears tuned to the big clock on the wall of the chamber. Slanting his eyes, he saw Dede Holmes staring at him, her big blue eyes anxious and wondering.

Two hours more, and Nebraska's first legislature would be feed for talk down at the Last Chance—and folks in Omaha would sneer at his feeble tries. He squirmed when two more legislators brushed by, shuffling past the squatting Indians in the hallway, headed for the door on the east side of the building. That cleaned the chamber of members except for Smed Tester and himself. And Smed Tester's smile gave him the idea that something big was brewing.

"You look nervous since legislators began leaving their seats." Big, handsome Smed Tester's voice flowed like sand in front of a light wind. "I suppose they fig-

ure a bill a fellow don't understand himself isn't worth voting on." There was mocking laughter in his sharp eyes.

"Who don't understand what?" Jeff demanded, gruffly, whipping the cigar from his jaws. Sweat dropped against his side from under the armpits.

"I presumed you didn't, since I know a lawyer friend of yours wrote the bill." Smed Tester chuckled dryly, and Jeff cringed inwardly. "The same lawyer that's teaching you the three R's and telling you all about government three nights a week."

"Why you—" Jeff clenched his fists. Lights were dancing in Tester's gray eyes as he went on.

"And after all, pudgy little Loon Larkins had to drag the bill up to the speaker."

Smed Tester looked and talked smoothly, and it burned Jeff, reminding him of himself: of that darned beard that wouldn't stay trimmed and where he could find a few strands of tobacco any time he ran low in the pocket; of hands and feet that couldn't find the right place to be; of his woolen shirt and blue jeans washed out by the sun. His voice sounded as polished to his own ears as a pay-night cuspidor.

"All I'm saying in that bill is common sense—something you wouldn't understand! I'm saying that folks who come out to this wild prairie and broke the ground and built themselves a sod home have the right to that claim, even if the territory ain't been opened by the government. And anybody who jumps the claim, after the government opens up, is breaking the law!" Jeff was excited, and tobacco burned its way into his stomach. "I understand *that!*"

A wall shot up in Tester's sharp gray eyes. "That isn't what Federal law says. And it isn't what Nebraska law will say." His eyes darted toward Jeff's hips. "Packing guns won't do any good here. It's brains here. You'll find that out, soon." He swept aside his coat, exposing his hardware. "Of course, we all carry a gun—just in case." He nodded toward the spectators' section.

Jeff didn't have to look; he knew. There were a dozen grim gunhawks there, and they were Tester's men. They were fur thieves, drifters, claim jumpers. They were led by a big, black-bearded fellow Jeff knew as One-Eyed Grunson.

JEFF SWALLOWED, knowing that if his bill didn't pass, these men would jump claims, and there'd be open war. He was restless inside, felt like he was swelling up. Smed Tester's eyes were cold, mocking. Then the big fellow turned and went outside. He tripped over the blanketed Indian buck in the hallway and kicked the fellow in the ribs. "Damn' lazy bums!" he spat, moving on.

Scratching his beard, Jeff scanned the small chamber, chopped into two sections by a railing to divide legislators from spectators. Emptiness hung like a dead weight, and he bit his cigar in two and threw aside the charred end. He missed the members who had shuffled around, whispering, passing out tanglefoot if you'd vote for this bill or that; missed the jaw-chawing about some little thing, that even the fireman, sergeant-at-arms, door keeper and spectators chimed into. The ticking of the clock got louder.

He was fishing around for some kind of plan when Loon Larkins puffed in, smelling as if he'd crept from the inside of a whiskey keg.

"We're licked! Plumb licked!"

Jeff shifted his chew, his nerves like a nest of hornets that had been poked with a stick. His barrel-bellied, legislator friend wasn't any big brain, but he had a grain of common sense and wasn't easy excited. Jeff watched the big, bulging eyes.

"You know where everybody's gone?" Larkins rasped into his ear. "They're over to a saloon Smed Tester's opened acrost the street! He's hung out the red underwear—right next door to that crazy Women's Temperance League office!"

Jeff swore under his breath. So that was it! On the frontier, the red underwear was the signal for free drinks. A numbness crawled through his body. Tester was playing on the weakest spot of the men—their love for fire water. To waste time, and keep Jeff's bill from going through.

Bitterly he gave his gun belt a hitch. It looked as if his bill was stomped, and that would mean he'd round up the squatters and they'd back their rights with gun-

smoke. Loon Larkins moved close to him.

"That ain't the worst!" His pudgy friend threw a side glance toward One-Eyed Grunson and his men. "I found Tester's got a bill of his own in his pocket, right now!" Jeff was being twisted inside. "I got it from the barkeep, who didn't know I was your pal. Tester's bill is putting squatters outside the law! Squatters not only won't have legal rights to their homes—they'll have to run off from the law!"

Jeff almost swallowed his chew. "He won't get nobody to listen to nothing like that. Never!"

"That's where you're wrong," Larkins said. "He's gonna slip it in easy. He's serving up drinks to get permission to pass his bill by a committee of three. Then he'll get the committee drunk. They'll pass that bill even after the legislature closes!"

"Can they do something like that?" Jeff demanded. "Can they now? Loon, this ain't no time for any of your fool notions——"

"It's the truth!" Larkins exclaimed.

His firmness tore Jeff apart inside. Larkins wasn't fooling; he was serious as death. If Tester's scheme worked now, the squatters were through. They would be hunted men.

Suddenly the clock was squeezing Jeff, knocking him off balance; he didn't have any idea what to do. He felt as helpless as a day-old kitten.

She was mighty pretty in her sunbonnet and long, light blue cotton dress. He'd heard folks say a time or two she wasn't so pretty, but to him she was the finest girl in Nebraska. His heart couldn't seem to get settled when she looked up at him with eyes that put him in mind of a clear sky after a summer storm.

"That one-eyed fellow went around to a few legislators and said something," she said, drawing her brows into two soft, worried clumps. "Right after, everybody started moving out. I don't like it!"

JEFF looked into her soft face. Her father had died a couple of weeks ago, leaving her alone on her place ten miles out of Omaha; she was his personal reason for the fight to pass the squatter's bill. But now, knowing he had no chance . . .

Her voice was thin, brittle as glass. "Jeff, you know something. You're worried. What is it?"

Jeff cussed the folks who had put him up for election and voted for him even after he told them he didn't belong in any part of the territory government. Her anxious face drove home the fact he 'd been nothing but a fur trapper, freighter, and buffalo hunter, and had followed the notion all his life that fists and guns were the only real ways to reason. She knew how feeble he was; she's seen him trying to get his long legs under the school-boy desk and finally give up and sit on top, whittling with a Bowie knife while affairs of state were discussed. She'd seen him eating hard-boiled eggs with his knife while Loon Larkins brought up his bill. Jeff shuffled around and then told Dede, in a thick voice while he looked at the floor, about the red underwear and about how things were looking. Suddenly she swept by him and tramped down the hallway.

Surprised, he turned. She held her skirts from the dusty floor. He wanted to yell out, but didn't. He just stood, listening to her tiny footfalls.

"I hope I don't know women," Loon Larkins said in a graveyard voice. Jeff was cold inside as his fat friend curled his lips and shook his head. "If I know women, that's the last you see of her. She's put up with your drinking, fighting, swearing and lying. But you let her down."

You could always depend on Loon Larkins for the worst! The clock was ticking louder as Jeff turned from his friend. A horse thumped down the street outside, and he wanted to be on it, riding as far from Omaha as he could get. He thought of Smed Tester and most of the legislators, stuffed in calico boiled shirts and dark coats, with two rows of frills jammed between shirt and coat; and he felt suddenly sick.

Maybe he belonged to riff-raff like One-Eyed Grunson, smiling up at the clock, over there. At least his kind packed guns openly, not under cutaways and coats. He spat his chew on the floor and paced, his boots

pounding but not breaking the steady clicking pace of the clock . . .

IF ONLY he wasn't the only man in the legislature who knew about Smed Tester's past and knew he'd stop at nothing, Jeff thought. Tester had got in the legislature, the *Palladium* had said, on the brag he'd been in Iowa's legislature and knew government inside and out. Jeff had grinned at first about that brag, but didn't think it was funny any more.

He'd seen Tester on a steamboat, coming up the yellow Missouri from White Cloud to Omaha. Jeff had been a deck passenger while Tester had had a stateroom, but he remembered wondering whether the handsome fellow in cutaway and high hat was a senator or what, the way he'd swung his gold cane and walked around with his nose up in the air. Jeff recalled another passenger had told him Tester was supposed to be a count or something, that he was slicking everybody at cards and dice, and that every lady aboard ship had her eyes on him. Tester had ridden high until the boat snagged on a sand bar off Nebraska City.

The captain had bragged his boat would float on dew, but he had soon given up trying to pull off the sand bar and called for help. It had been a deck hand off the rescue boat that had snarled at Smed Tester.

"That's the coyote, there!" His face had gone white as death. "He had a gang of claim jumpers out near Eureka. Got all the mill sites, fords, and best land gobbled up that way. Then he bled us dry till we bought back his claims!" He had pulled out a gun, trembling as if he had the fevers. "I been looking for him for two years!"

Tester had laughed in the fellow's face, hid as he had been behind the captain. They'd dragged off the deck hand, and the passengers, a ragged lot of land speculators, gamblers, adventurers and merchants, who'd seen fights till they'd gotten dull, forgot the whole thing.

Then later, up in Plattsmouth, Jeff had come down the street on the tail end of a shooting. That same deck hand had been stretched in the street, and Smed Tester had stood over him with smoking gun. Jeff recalled the words of the sheriff. "Can't figger it out. Hark here was a good man. Been around here before. Never knowed him to lose his haid. He went crazy and attacked this feller on sight. No doubt he was shot in self defense——"

Curious, Jeff had stuck around. Drifters had come in Plattsmouth, on horseback, by stage, by steamer. One-Eyed Grunson had been one of them; the rest of that crew sitting now in the spectators' section had been the others.

There wasn't a bit of doubt, Smed Tester meant to make another clean-up. And those damn' fool legislators——

Jeff knew now why he hadn't felt in place here. It had been more than the walls and more than the poise. These people didn't speak his language. They worried and stewed about the legal way to do things. He didn't care a hang about anything except which was right and which was wrong—measured by common sense. Common sense told him that squatters had done the work and the fighting for their land and that it belonged to them, no matter what Washington said. Dede Holmes and folks like her were entitled to a square deal.

And how far will you go to see they get a square deal?

He heard the distant tinkle of glasses, heard buzzing voices, laughing. Heard Smed Tester's voice, booming: "Fire and fall back! Give the next man his turn for a shot!"

Jeff was curled up inside, pacing the floor. How would going over there and shooting things up help the squatters? His jaws tightened as he looked up at the clock. One hour more——

One-Eyed Grunson and his men were grinning, watching the big hands . . .

Jeff had to decide. Quick. He banged his fist into the palm of his hand. A loud crack answered his slap, but it was distant, outside the building. He stiffened.

Anxiously he listened to the far-off scrape of chairs. He jumped inside as glasses crashed and the voices of women buzzed angrily.

He sensed how much he'd been holding

in him when he rushed for the door. He squeezed through in front of Loon Larkins, whose eyes were bulging. The Indians had vanished from the hallway. Jeff's hand dropped on the cool butt of his holstered gun.

His broad face flushed with excitement. Loon Larkins stumbled past and then wheeled in the doorway.

"The Temperance League!" he bellowed, grinning. "Dede must have rounded 'em up!"

SHOCK ripped through Jeff like a knife when he reached the steps of the capital building. White-faced legislators poured from the saloon building, their hands laced over their heads, each pair or so followed by a club-swinging, red-faced female. Their gruff protests and pleas for reason were lost under the angry screeches of the women.

The excitement was spreading fast. The horses spooked and tugged at the hitching racks. Indians shuffled down the street, rolling startled eyes across their shoulders. A stream of curses turned Jeff's gaze upstreet. A drunken bull whacker crawled up on his wagon and turned his team, his wide eyes poking back through the dust. A couple of dogs yapped and danced around in the confused tangle of legislators and women.

Dede Holmes, standing apart, watched with tiny fists resting on her hips. The way her lower lip was hooked over her upper, showed a grim and business-like mood.

Jeff didn't know whether to laugh or get sore. One old lady dragged the speaker from the saloon by the ear, spilling whiskey from an up-turned bottle with her other hand. His cries of "Ouch! Leggo me!" ended suddenly in gurgling and sputtering as the old lady dropped the bottle before the horse trough and dunked the speaker.

The speaker came out coughing and gasping, and after he took a quick look at the tight-lipped old lady, started down the street. Jeff saw sudden danger and glanced at Loon Larkin's wide, grinning face.

"Come on, we got to hold these guys here! Take the upper end of the street!"

Hooking out his six-gun, Jeff leaped down the stairs. The legislators and women kicked up little pods of dust, through which bounced the excited dogs. Across the way, a crowd of curious people were gathering.

Jeff was determined as he ran ahead of the speaker and faced him with the gun. The beefy fellow's face was bloated and red, and his mouth was open. He stopped short, puffing, a puzzled look on his face. Jeff stood ready. The old lady swung from behind, catching the speaker behind the ear with a loud, ringing slap.

"Get back till we vote on that squatter's bill!" Jeff barked hoarsely. "On the run!"

Without a word the speaker turned and waddled toward the capital steps. Jeff was tight-lipped, keeping his six-gun levelled as he herded other legislators toward the building. They were confused and beaten, and it wasn't much of a job. Jeff didn't bother with Smed Tester, remembering One-Eyed Grunson and his men inside; he crossed the street at a run and took the capital steps, three at a time. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Loon Larkins and Smed Tester both following him.

He blinked as he got out of the sun and into the gray hallway. When he burst into the chamber he smelled whiskey and sweat, and things seemed to be squeezing in on him.

But Jeff forgot everything else when he saw One-Eyed Grunson running from under the big clock. One of the legislators roared, "Them damn' fool females! That looney fat Larkin! It's time to quit anyhow!"

A glance told Jeff the story. One-Eyed had moved the hand of the clock past adjournment time!

Anger pounced on Jeff like a coyote on a sick calf. He was no match for Smed Tester and his cronies, playing their own lousy and crooked kind of game. But from now on, he was going to play *his way!*

As he rushed forward, he told himself this was the end. He'd be in boothill tomorrow. But by damn, here was one legislator who'd see that squatters got a square deal, or else!

HANDS on the butts of his guns, Jeff wheeled under the big clock. His heart was pounding like hoof-beats in his chest and the blood was kicking him in the temples.

"I'll drill anybody tries to get out that door till we've voted on my bill!" Jeff said hoarsely.

That, he saw quickly, was the spark that robbed Smed Tester of reason. With a curse, the big fellow clawed for his gun.

"Duck, Loon!" Jeff shouted.

Men spilled away on all sides. Crawled for cover like animals. As Tester's gun levelled off, Jeff's bullet caught and spun him. Tester dumped against the wall.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jeff saw Loon Larkin drawing and firing from a crouch. A warning turned him. "Tester's men!"

The blasts deafened in the little, closed room and the smell of powder was strong. Tester's men spattered bullets at him. His gun crashed once, dumping One-Eyed Grunson.

Then his lips tightened and breath rushed from him as lead slapped into his body. He tried to hold his feet but staggered and fell against a desk.

Things clouded up pretty bad and he wasn't sure what was going on. Muzzle-blasts flashed like torches and the smoke rolled in like a prairie fire. The roar was in his head, heavy and terrible. But one thought shot home.

Tester's gunmen were in the open. And legislators had out their hardware and were backing him up.

Suddenly Jeff felt as if he was part of the legislature. The members talked his language. And he had to get back in this debate. This was talk he understood!

He felt sick. Dizzy. Braced his arms on something, the desk maybe. Threw his weight over his arms. Collapsed back to his knees, cursing slowly.

The roar—the smoke—the blasts of six-guns. Shadows wrapped around him. He fought to bring things into focus. To shake off the shadows. But he couldn't. He couldn't——

Someone was crawling toward him. Bleeding. Trying to get out of the line of fire. He fought to see.

Smed Tester!

And Tester saw him.

It was the biggest job of Jeff's life. The gun was a big hunk of lead. His hands wouldn't grip, his arms wouldn't lift.

Blood was gushing from Tester's lips and his gun was like a wavering, hollow finger . . .

The gun danced in Jeff's hand, giving him a savage feeling of satisfaction. Tester's head snapped back, turning at a crazy angle on his shoulders. He slumped forward . . .

Then the chamber was quiet as death, and very dark after the muzzle blasts. Smoke crept in like a thick fog. Jeff saw movement in the smoke, but he turned away—toward the speaker's desk.

There was only one thought in his mind, but that desk seemed a mile away. He staggered toward it, groping, an iron band across his chest. He sighed as the rough wood was under his hand. He saw the white paper—*his bill*—and clutched it.

The speaker's voice blasted from the shadows. "You don't need no more votes on that bill, Jeff! That bill done past! That's gun whip law!"

Fading swiftly, Jeff slumped forward. He recalled trying to hang on but knew he hadn't and wondered where he was. There were dim cheers; then he heard feet running toward him, and he saw a movement of skirts.

He wasn't out cold, though, because somebody said, "Oh doctor! Is he hurt bad? I—I think an awful lot of him. Tell me——"

Dede Holmes! He wondered whether he was smiling; he wanted to smile. Then he was dimly, but pleasantly, surprised.

"Shucks, don't you worry none. He ain't gonna die. Bullet didn't get his lung, noway. Sides, God ain't gonna let a good legislator die now, when the territory of Nebraska's needing him so right bad!"

Jeff felt awful peaceful-like, as clumsy hands ripped open his wet, sticky shirt.

RED CLOUD THE SIOUX

By T. V. JOHNSON

Half warrior, half devil, he scourged the Plains in a holy war against the whites, while throughout the East rang the cry: "Justice for the Redman!"

IN HIS COLORFUL TRAPPINGS, Red Cloud the Sioux presented a contrast to Colonel Carrington in his dusty blue uniform. The Sioux chief's muscular bronze body bore the marks of many battles and the scars of the Sun Dance through which he had passed to prove his manhood. His great jutting nose and downward-turned thin-lipped mouth revealed arrogance and cruelty. He had belted a buffalo robe about his waist. His moccasins and leggings were fringed and beaded with blues and scarlets. Silver medallions adorned the braids hanging below his scalp lock and a necklace of grizzly bear claws rested on his chest.

He spoke angrily to Colonel Carrington in the gutteral tongue of the Sioux which the interpreter translated. "If the white chief goes to the hunting ground of the Sioux, in two moons there will not be a hoof left to his command!"

Throwing his buffalo robe about his shoulders, Red Cloud sprang from the platform of the Council Chamber.

So began the story of Fort Phil

Kearney and two of the bloodiest years of warfare the frontier ever knew.

It was just after the Civil War. The cry of '*Gold!*' had run from the gulches of Virginia City in Montana Territory. The shortest route to that promised land led north from Fort Laramie through the Powder River country which had been guaranteed by treaty to the Sioux, the most savage Indians on the Plains.

The government wanted the Sioux to give up this country so that emigrants could travel the Bozeman Trail to the Montana mines and, to that end, sent a Commission to Fort Laramie in 1866 to treat with the Indians. Few members of the Commission cared that the Powder River was the last hunting ground of the Sioux and that, if they gave it up, the tribes would starve. Not so Red Cloud. The Plains had bred in the Sioux chief a fierce pride of race, and he vowed he would never see his people reduced to beggars to be starved on reservations by corrupt agents and politicians. He refused to deal with the Commission, and after he had warned Colonel Carrington not to advance into the Powder River, he sent another, more drastic message by a friendly Cheyenne chief. He said he would burn any fort the army built in the Powder River, and kill everyone in it.

"The white man lies and steals. My lodges were many. Now they are few. The white man wants all. The white man must fight and the Indian will die where his fathers died."

The members of the Commission refused to recognize Red Cloud's ultimatum. Public clamour and powerful interests demanded the opening of the Bozeman Trail. The politicians in Washington said there would be peace on the Powder River. Consequently, there would be peace. The Commission continued with their treaty making, although the Sioux, who owned Powder River, had left the Council.

"There'll be no trouble," the head of the Commission assured Colonel Carrington with the blindness that sometimes affects men in public life.

Carrington hoped the head of the Commission was right. The Colonel and his command, the Second Battalion of the Eighteenth Infantry, was better fitted for a peaceful than a warlike expedition. High officials had told them they could build Fort Phil Kearney undisturbed on the Powder River. The Eighteenth had brought a sawmill for the purpose and there were painters and carpenters among the troops. Carrington was a civil engineer from Yale and had drawn the plans for his fort the previous year. The plans were inspired, for Carrington was a scholar as well as an engineer; a slim man whose beard enhanced the sensitive cast of his features. He was not a professional militarist.

He had received his commission during the Civil War, as had the majority of his officers. Neither he nor his officers had had any experience of Indians. Congress, which had grown economy minded as it always does after a war, had made it impossible to garrison the frontier with experienced Indian fighters.

The same was true of the troops who were all recruits. Economy had also armed the command with old fashioned, muzzle-loading Springfield muskets, for which there was only a small supply of ammunition.

The presence of four of the officer's families, including Carrington's added further to the peaceful nature of the expedition. Mrs. Carrington and the three other women had led sheltered lives with their children until their husbands had accepted commissions in the army and reported for duty on the frontier. The Plains were as new to them as to their husbands.

The Second Battalion consisted approximately of two hundred and fifty men. In June of 1866 this small force marched out of Fort Laramie to build Fort Phil Kearney and to garrison the thousands of miles of wilderness held by Red Cloud and his Sioux.

Jim Bridger, the old plainsman who had been hired as guide, had his doubts of the expedition from the beginning. Bridger was nearly seventy and the Commissioners at Laramie thought he was growing cautious with advancing years when he predicted trouble with Red Cloud.

Bridger's misgivings were shortly justified. The Eighteenth, after marching for twenty-six days, reached the valley of the Little Piney near what is now Sheridan, Wyoming, and started construction of Fort Phil Kearney.

Red Cloud had been waiting. The second day after the arrival of the troops, he struck, slaughtering a party of eight outside the camp.

The attack was the beginning of daily raids. The soldier-details that went out to cut hay for the stock and timber often had to fight their way back to the post. Warriors galloped on the surrounding hills, painted and stripped for war, shaking their lances at the grim-faced troops.

More than once, Red Cloud rode his horse within plain view of the rapidly rising fort, flaunting his contempt for the garrison. By day, Sioux mirror signals flashed from the woods, and at night their fires flickered in the darkness.

The Indians were past masters of guerilla warfare and utilized every trick of craftiness and guile. A favorite ruse was for a warrior to cover himself with an animal hide and crawl up to the stockade to wait for the sentry to pass on his beat. The sentry, straining his eyes in the darkness, could see nothing. All he heard was a faint whisper of sound before an arrow thudded into his heart. If a man relaxed for an instant, he vanished without trace. Sleeping or waking, the men, women and children of Fort Phil Kearney knew no security. Like shadows the Sioux appeared and like shadows they melted away. Troopers died silently on duty or screaming in the hostile villages of the Tongue River.

Few men could endure the torture of being staked naked on the ground with live coals heaped on the abdomen to burn into the bowels. The fate of white women captured by the Sioux was even worse.

"Every warrior in the northwest is jinin' Red Cloud, Gineral," Bridger reported to Carrington; "the Sissetons, the Bad Faces, the Ogallallas, the Minneconjous, the Unkapapas, the Gros Ventres, the northern Cheyennes an' the Arapahoes. Soon as Red Cloud's got 'em all together, he's goin' to stop cuttin' us off by bits an' jump the fort."

CARRINGTON had discovered that Bridger was a better adviser than the members of the Commission at Laramie. If Carrington had been an experienced Indian fighter and if his troops had been frontiersmen instead of recruits, he could have struck back at Red Cloud. As it was, he hastened to finish the fort so that the command could take refuge behind its stockade. Defense was more natural than offense to his scholarly nature. But he did not once consider abandoning Fort Phil Kearney. Nor did his officers and men.

Carrington knew that the situation was desperate. Counting the troops, civilians, teamsters and prisoners in the guard house, there were not more than three hundred and fifty men to hold Phil Kearney against thousands of Sioux warriors. Many of the antiquated Springfields had become unserviceable. Ammunition was so low that some men had only forty-five rounds. Reinforcements had not arrived. Carrington had written for them but his request had not been heeded. Politicians in Washington and Fort Laramie continued to insist that Powder River was peaceful, and the Department of the Platte had no information to the contrary. A great deal of money was being made by agents who were selling the Indians arms, ammunition and supplies. Recognition of a state of war would have prohibited this profitable business. Also, a wave of sympathy for the Indians had swept the East. The Easterners had long ago driven the red men from their part of the country and so could cry "Justice for the Indian!" without detriment to their interests or harm to themselves.

Few people knew the true situation at Fort Phil Kearney. Communication with such an isolated post was limited and difficult. The Sioux had a habit of waylaying and scalping the couriers.

Some of the officers and men fretted at Carrington's lack of aggressive action, particularly the younger ones. Lt. Colonel Fetterman cursed. "Give me eight" men

and I'll ride through the whole Sioux nation!"

His hope for action came sooner than he expected.

On December twenty-first, the wood train moved out as usual to cut logs needed to finish the hospital. It had gone only a short distance when the picket on one of the nearby hills signaled. "Many Indians. Wood train has gone into corral." The Colonel at once ordered a detail to the relief of the train and put Captain Powell in charge.

Powell was a reserved, unpopular man who had—so he later said—been driven half crazy by the worry of holding the fort with insufficient arms and men. An eyewitness reported that he had once refused to go out on a detail and had remained in his quarters, pleading illness. Fetterman, presuming on his senority to Powell, asked to take the latter's place, a request the Colonel reluctantly granted, for he knew Fetterman's rashness. Captain Brown and Lieutenant Grummond, two other officers impatient for glory, were also assigned to the detail.

As the troops marched out the gates, the Colonel climbed onto the sentry walk, calling sternly to Fetterman, "Support the wood train, relieve it and report to me. Under no circumstances must you cross Lodge Trail Ridge in pursuit of the Indians."

Perhaps, it occurred to the Colonel that Fetterman had one more than the number of men that he had asked for in order to ride through the whole Sioux nation.

Fetterman's force had hardly gotten out of sight when it was discovered that there was no surgeon with the party. Dr. Hines was sent with an orderly in pursuit. Within a few minutes Hines returned, shaken and out of breath, to report that the wood train had broken corral and moved safely to Piney Island but that Fetterman had disobeyed orders and crossed Lodge Trail Ridge and that there were so many Indians it was impossible to join the relieving force. Hines had barely finished his report when a soldier broke in with the news.

"Firing from the direction of Lodge Trail Ridge, sir!"

Immediately Carrington sounded a general alarm and ordered the reliable Captain Ten Eyck out with all the men who could be spared. At the double quick, Ten Eyck marched across the broken ice of the creek and up the snow clad slopes of the hills while those left in the post listened anxiously to the rapid firing that echoed from the valley beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. For a few moments the firing grew in intensity, then weakened to scattered volleys. The volleys in turn slackened to random shots. A crack in the still, cold air. Another crack. After that, there was complete silence.

Through the long dreadful afternon the garrison waited. Did that silence mean that Fetterman had been victorious or that he had met disaster? Would he and his men return triumphantly with Ten Eyck or would Red Cloud and his painted warriors boil over the hills to storm the fort? Men stood rigidly at the loop holes while Frances Grummond, the bride who was soon to have a child, prayed for her husband. At nightfall, wagon wheels crunched on the snow outside the stockade. The gates were opened and into the post slowly rolled a line of wagons with the bodies of forty-nine dead. The soldiers acting as escorts reported in voices that were hardly articulate. "There are no more to come in, sir. The rest are still out there. Not a man of Fetterman's force is left alive."

Gently Mrs. Carrington drew the grief stunned Frances Grummond in her arms and led her to the Carrington quarters. Ten Eyck, still in his heavy coat and fur cap, haltingly told the Colonel what had happened. In an area of forty feet on the reddened snow he had found the bodies of Brown and Fetterman with sixty-five men stripped naked, scalped and mutilated with a ferocity the Sioux had never excelled. Men had been disembowled; their heads had been beaten to a pulp of blood and brains; some had been partially skinned; the vital parts of others had been slashed from their bodies.

Blood clots showing where Indian dead and wounded had lain and empty shells

about the bodies of Fetterman's men testified to the gallantry with which the troops had fought their losing battle—a battle which had been lost partly because of the inadequate fire power of the old Springfield muskets.

So had ended Fetterman's boast to ride through the whole Sioux nation.

Ten Eyck had gathered what bodies he could and then, fearing the Indians might return, had started for the post. The bodies of Grummond and the remainder of the men were still on the battlefield. The Colonel felt they should be recovered although his officers protested that the Sioux, crazed with blood, were massing to attack the post and that it would be death to venture outside the gates.

Carrington held firm. "We must and we will rescue our dead. The Indians rescue their warriors who fall in battle. We cannot be afraid to do the same. Not only would it be a disservice to our men to leave them on the battlefield but it would be a sign of weakness which would encourage Red Cloud to assault the post."

Carrington was pedantic; he lacked the dash of leadership. But that day he proved he was a soldier. He would not ask his officers to do what he would not do himself. Sitting erect and stiff in his saddle, he rode out with a small detail to bring back the bodies of his men. Before he left he issued secret instructions to the officer of the day. "If, in my absence, Indians in overwhelming numbers attack, put the women and children in the magazine with supplies of water, bread and crackers and other supplies that seem best. If necessary destroy all together, rather than have any captured alive."

MIRACULOUSLY, the Sioux held their attack. The Colonel returned hours later with the remaining dead of the Fetterman command. By nightfall the mercury fell to thirty below zero. The carpenters built the coffins in the headquarters building where Frances Grummond heard them sawing and hammering on the box for her husband's body. The men digging the mass grave had to work in fifteen minute shifts for fear of being frozen The sentries, who had been doubled and re-doubled, had to be changed every half hour. The wind increased in fury, howling about the post and drifting the snow high on the stockade.

This blizzard was all that saved Phil Kearney that night and the days following. But when the storm spent itself it was obvious to everyone that the Sioux would certainly storm the fort unless reinforcements arrived. To go for help in the bitter weather with the Indians swarming everywhere was asking for swift and terrible death.

Jim Bridger was not at the post or he might have offered his services. The Colonel called for volunteers and Portugee Phillips, frontiersman in the employ of the quartermaster, stepped forward. He would ride to Laramie if he were allowed to choose his horse, and if he were allowed to see Frances Grummond. This last surprising request was granted, as well as the first. Portugee Phillips had seen Mrs. Grummond around the post although she had never noticed him. It is uncertain whether Phillips was moved merely by sympathy for her plight or whether he felt a stronger emotion. Frances Grummond was young and pretty. Phillips visited her in the bare room of the Headquarters buildings where she sat alone, candlelight flickering on her white face and haunted eyes. His voice choked as he stood before her. "I am going to Laramie for help with dispatches," he blurted out. "I am going for your sake. Here is my wolf robe."

He thrust it at her so that the rough grey folds tumbled in her lap.

HALF AN HOUR LATER, leading one of the Colonel's Kentucky thoroughbreds, he walked out of the sally port gate into the blinding snow. Ahead of him lay a ride of two hundred and thirty-five miles to Fort Laramie. He was the garrison's only hope. But not a soul in the post expected he would reach his destination alive. Phillips led his horse all night, bending his head against the sting of the blizzard and picking his way through snow filled gulches to evade the Indians. When day dawned he hid in a drift. His meal was a handful of crackers and a drink

of ice water. At dark he started on again. With unerring plainsman's instinct he held to his course across the great wintery wastes concealing himself by day and riding by night. His hands and feet froze. His horse stumbled into drifts. Fighting cold and fatigue, he grew too numb to watch for prowling Sioux. The only reason he was not discovered and tracked down was that the Indians did not think a white man would risk the frigid gale.

Christmas Eve, the officers at Laramie were giving a dance at "Bedlam," the bachelor's quarters. In the midst of a tune the orchestra broke off and the dancers stopped to stare amazed at the strange figure of a man who burst open the door and who stood swaying on the threshold. The intruder's exhausted, red-rimmed eyes stared dully from an ice matted tangle of beard. Light streaming through the doorway shone on a horse that lay dying in the snow.

"Dispatches, sir, from Fort Phil Kearney," Phillips mumbled.

The Post Commander hastened forward and Phillips gasped out the desperate need for reinforcements. The Colonel snapped a horrified question but Phillips did not hear. His grasp weakened on the door frame. He wavered and then crashed unconscious to the floor.

The news of the massacre burst like a bombshell. Without waiting to learn the details, newspapers, politicians and the public demanded explanation of a tragedy on the frontier—the frontier that was reputed to be peaceful. The loudest in their demands were the politicians who had been responsible for the Eighteenth being sent to Powder River.

The Indian Commissioner was especially indignant. His explanation of the massacre was that the Indians had come to Phil Kearney to beg for food and ammunition for hunting. Carrington had ordered the soldiers to fire on them, and to protect themselves, the poor, starving Sioux had turned on the troops. True to tradition, neither the politicians nor the public accepted blame. The army was made the scapegoat. The Department Commander was relieved, and Carrington was ordered to give up his command.

It was difficult for Carrington to leave the post he had built with such pride, knowing he was condemned in the eyes of the press and the people. But he did so without protest, although he and his party nearly perished in the cold as a result of the unjust order demanded by the public that he relinquish his command. The widowed Mrs. Grummond traveled in a wagon heaped with straw. Her child was to be born in a few months. She huddled, shivering, about her tiny stove, wrapped in buffalo robes that could not protect her against the chill. The coffin of her husband traveled in another wagon. At night the mules had to be kept moving with whips to prevent them from lying down and freezing to death. Several of the teamsters froze arms and legs so that they had to be amputated. One man died of exposure. Near Fort Casper, the Sioux, stirring from their icy lethargy, raided the train, and Carrington was wounded. After nearly a week of plodding through the snow, the party reached Casper where Carrington learned he was to proceed to Fort McPherson to be tried by court martial.

No one thought to inquire why the army had been so weakened that only a battalion of recruits could be sent to the Powder River. Or why the troops had been armed with antiquated muskets. Or why the Indian Bureau had insisted the Sioux were harmless. If anyone did presume to question those matters, they were quickly hushed.

AT FORT PHIL KEARNEY the sub-zero winter persisted, holding the Sioux attack on the post. If the garrison had been surrounded before, it was in a state of actual siege now. Night and day the men slept with their rifles. Travel was abandoned on the Bozeman Trail and supplies were so hard to get that scurvy broke out among the troops. The small amount of correspondence that reached the east from soldiers often started with this phrase. "This may be my last letter." And, yet the men did not desert.

Rotting with scurvy, half frozen and haunted by the threat of Sioux scalping knives, they stuck to their posts. Hatred

of Red Cloud bit deep. The flag that had been raised when the fort had been completed flew from its staff and would continue to fly as long as a man lived to fire a rifle. The Eighteenth had been reinforced and became the Twenty-Seventh Infantry. The recruits of the Eighteenth were veterans, now.

The departure of Carrington had only strengthened Red Cloud's determination to destroy the fort. More and more warriors joined his banner, waiting for the weather to warm so they could make one final, successful assault. Some of the Sioux passed their time in winter camp, feasting and dancing but Red Cloud, inflexible in his objective, stayed in his teepee on Little Goose Creek where he could watch the fort. He had dealt the hated post a body blow with the Fetterman massacre. Soon he would annhiliate it completely. Powder River would be free of the white man. Seldom has an Indian in history planned and executed a campaign with such tenacity as Red Cloud planned and executed the destruction of Fort Phil Kearney.

Meanwhile, the public, satisfied that justice had been done by court martialing Carrington, forgot about Fort Phil Kearney and turned its attention to the presidential elections and the cost of living. Here and there a military man pleaded for more troops on the frontier and modern arms. New Springfields were furnished the troops but that was all.

The end of July Red Cloud had gathered over three thousand warriors, the pride of the Sioux nation. And on the second of August he launched his great offensive. His plan was to ambush the wood train, then to storm the fort. By a strange quirk of fate Captain James Powell was in command of the troops that were detailed to guard the wood train on the second of August. With the wood train was Portugee Phillips who had returned to Phil Kearney after being hospitalized for several months at Laramie. The rest in the hospital had been his only reward.

The continuous Indian alarms had made it customary to corral the wagons which Powell had done by removing the running gear and arranging the wagons in a long oval, filling the spaces between with logs and sacks of grain. Shortly after dawn when Portugee Phillips had left for the fort with a heavily guarded load of wood, one of the sentries suddenly shouted.

"Indians!"

Another soldier leaping up, cried. "Look! Thousands of them!"

In single file, a long line of Sioux, ghastly in war paint and feathers, rode down from the hills toward the wood camp. Without waiting for the bugle to blast recall, the soldiers and civilians with the wood train leapt wildly for the corral, firing as they fled. They reached the enclosure just in time. Red Cloud was standing on a bluff, his magnificent figure easily distinguishable in his eagle feather head-dress As the men scrambled over the wagon bodies, he waved his scarlet blanket for the charge. From behind every hill and tree erupted hordes of mounted warriors, shrilling the dread war cry of the Sioux. An old sergeant remarked to his comrade, "We haven't a chance. There's three thousand of them. Thirty-two of us. We're dead men for sure."

"Find your places, men," Captain Powell ordered. "We're fighting for our lives today."

Defeat meant capture of the fort and death by torture. Every soldier and civilian vowed to himself that he would not be taken alive. And that when he died, he would take with him into hell as many Sioux as he could find through his rifle sights.

"Here they come!" Powell cried. "Shoot to kill!"

Down on the corral swept the mounted warriors, yelling and whipping their ponies. Naked bronze bodies clung to the racing horses. Faces bedaubed with paint contorted exultantly. A storm of arrows and bullets spattered the wagons.

"Fire!" Powell commanded.

FROM THE CORRAL spat red flashes of flame. The line of warriors faltered, regathered and swept on. So close were they that their horses reared against the wagon bodies. Wounded animals screamed above the yelling of the Sioux

and the ricocheting sing of bullets. Steadily the firing continued, disrupting the charge so that it wavered and rolled around the corral instead of over it. Behind upturned wagons, sweating men jerked open the rifle bolts, jamming shells into them and handing them as fast as they were loaded to the soldiers and expert civilian marksmen on the firing line. The Sioux had never encountered the new Springfields before. Confused by the regularity of the shooting, they soon retreated.

Red Cloud had been repulsed in the first battle where a large force of Indians had encountered the new guns of the white man. The Sioux chief's power and prestige had suffered an irrevocable blow. Over a thousand of his warriors were dead. He would never again be able to rally his forces to attack Phil Kearney. The fort was saved and the Bozeman Trail was opened. The tidings of the Wagon Box fight were hailed with rejoicing in the country, although the public was again startled to learn there was still trouble in the Powder River. But, it was a victory this time and so it was all right. Powell was brevetted for gallantry and promoted. Only Carrington, whose defense had been suppressed in Washington, read of the battle with mixed feelings, wondering if Fetterman might not have fared better if he too had been armed with the new Springfields.

AT PHIL KEARNEY after the Wagon Box fight, the troops were able to sleep without their rifles for the first time since the fort had been built. It was no longer necessary to guard the wood train closely. The stock grazed without fear of being stampeded and the troops hunted and explored the wilderness of the Big Horns. Emigrants began to appear on the Bozeman Trail. The army at Phil Kearney had opened the Powder River to the white man.

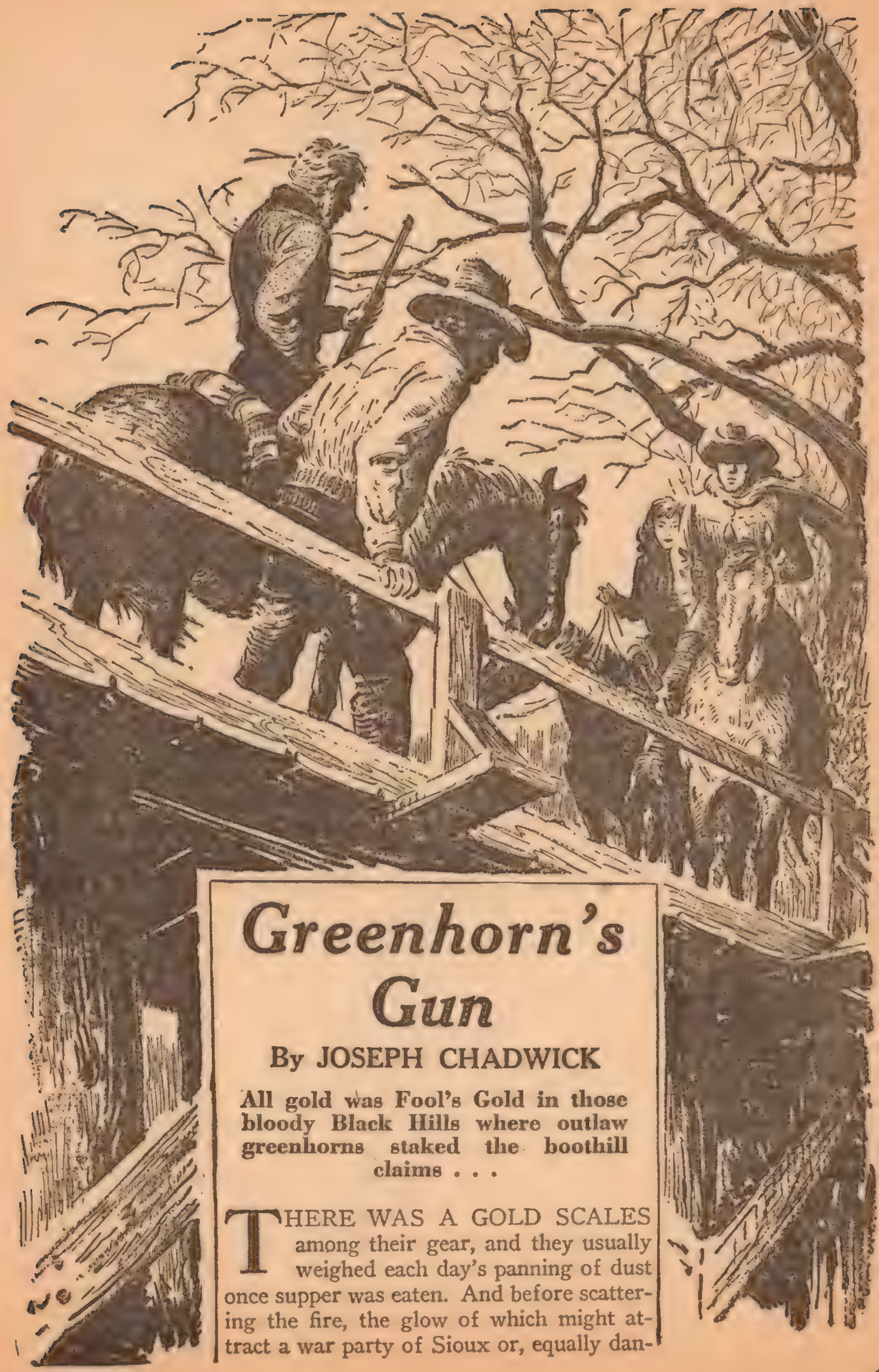
And then, without warning, the blow fell. A dispatch arrived at the fort which the officers read with stunned disbelief. The government had sent another of its inevitable peace commissions to treat with the Sioux at Laramie. Red Cloud, who attended the council still holding grimly to his purpose, told the commissioners that the fort must be abandoned and the Bozeman Trail closed. The fact that Red Cloud no longer had the power to enforce his demand did not occur to the commission, or if it did, what was more important was that the new Union Pacific Railroad was opening a better way to Montana than the Bozeman Trail. Citing old treaties that had been conveniently overlooked before, the commission reported that the army had no right to be in the Powder River and that Phil Kearney must be given up.

So, on a sunlit August day, the flag that Carrington had raised nearly two years before was lowered while troops and officers looked on bitterly. In the woods and on the surrounding hills, Red Cloud's Sioux watched the ceremony. The men standing with their rifles and packs scowled at them, cursing beneath their breath. Many of the men had been at the fort since it had been built; had fought those Sioux and had seen their comrades scalped and tortured. Fetterman and Grummond and the countless other soldiers and civilians had lost their lives in vain.

In years to come more lives would be lost to regain what was being given up that day. The Powder River would have to be re-opened. Battles would be fought and men would die in the War of the Wild Roses and with Custer on the Little Big Horn. But the government had made its decision and the army was the servant of the government.

The long line of troops with baggage wagons marched from the gates. From the hills and the woods rode the waiting Sioux, yelling triumphantly. A chief who might have been Red Cloud galloped among them.

The troops looked back and saw flames licking the log buildings and the stockade that Carrington had built. Red Cloud had accomplished his purpose. In defeat, he was granted victory by official decree as black smoke enveloped the last of Fort Phil Kearney.



Greenhorn's Gun

By JOSEPH CHADWICK

All gold was Fool's Gold in those bloody Black Hills where outlaw greenhorns staked the boothill claims . . .

THERE WAS A GOLD SCALES among their gear, and they usually weighed each day's panning of dust once supper was eaten. And before scattering the fire, the glow of which might attract a war party of Sioux or, equally dan-

gerous to prospectors in the Black Hills, a patrol of soldiers. They made a ritual of it.

The scales belonged to Len Renault, so it was up to him to do the weighing and marking the amount, to the exact pennyweight, in the tally book he kept. Jim Logan would light his pipe, edge closer to the dying fire, and say, "Well, let's see how much richer we are."

Len- Renault would grin, and say, "Might as well," then get busy.

But tonight Jim was uneasy. There was a strange restlessness in him, not one of the mind exactly but of the senses. He had a *feeling* that something was not quite right. He stood up as soon as he'd finished eating, without reaching into his pocket for his pipe, and peered about the shadow-filled gulch. The stream they worked sang its usual pleasant song. The gulch was as empty as ever, the only moving thing in sight being Jim's condemned gray at graze on the far side of the creek. But something was wrong. Jim felt it.

He said, "Len, let's kill the fire—quick."

Renault looked up sharply, not having finished his meal. "What about weighing the dust?" he asked. He was a short, stocky, half handsome man of about thirty—Jim's own age—and still something of a greenhorn. He was ruddy faced, comfortable looking. But now, eyeing the lean Jim Logan, who'd never been a greenhorn, Renault lost some of his color and his body stiffened. "Something wrong?" he asked, whispering it.

"I don't know," Jim said flatly. "But kill the fire. I'm bringing the gray in."

He picked up his catch rope, strode to the creek, forded it. They'd had two horses, but Renault's animal, a bay mare, had fallen down a rocky slope and broken its leg shortly after they reached the Hills a month before. Jim had shot the mare, Renault having been too squeamish for the unpleasant chore.

Losing the mare had been their only bad luck so far. They'd seen no Indians, and no soldiers had stumbled upon their diggings. The two of them had gotten along pretty well. They'd hit it off from their first meeting, down in Cheyenne, perhaps because they were as unalike as day and night. Jim Logan had spent his life on the frontier, and Len Renault was a city man. Jim was aware of his partner's limitations. He knew that if something were wrong, it was up to him to look out for Len Renault as well as for himself.

He roped the ex-cavalry horse, led it back to the camp, and Renault had scattered and stamped out the fire. Renault said nervously, "Jim, if something happens, you won't ride off and leave me behind?"

"You know me better than all that, Len."

"Sure. I'm just jumpy."

"Look; take it easy. It may be nothing, at all."

Renault grabbed his arm. "I hear something!" he gasped.

JIM had his gun belted on, but he reached for his rifle. He too heard the sound, and identified it as shod hoofs striking rocks. He peered through the thickening dusk and saw a man leading a pack horse. The stranger had come in by the gulch's north entrance. He was traveling fast, hurrying. Some of the tension left Jim, and he said to Renault, "It's all right. One of that bunch from north of us."

The man came on at a dog-trot, swerving toward the campsite, and Jim splashed across the creek to meet him. Jim recognized him as Mel Archer by the heavy black beard that hung down over his chest like a bib. Renault came across after Jim, and his breathing was fluttery.

"What's up, Mel?" Jim asked.

"Soldiers," Archer muttered, halting—but looking as though he meant to go on immediately. "A patrol from Laramie jumped the camp up at Hubbard's Gulch . . . . Caught everybody but me. I was back in the brush, and got away when the soldiers bivouacked. They'll be coming this way. You two had better clear out."

"If they made camp," Jim said, "they won't move on until morning."

"Still, you'd better not waste any time," Archer said. "Anybody they catch here in the Sioux country goes to the military prison at Fort Russell. They ain't locking me up if I can help it. I'll be plenty far from

here by sun-up. S'long!"

He moved away with his burdened horse, at the same fast pace.

THE ARMY was attempting to clear the Black Hills of prospectors to placate the Sioux. Jim Logan had known of the risk he and his partner had been running, so he could do no whining now. His feeling of uneasiness was gone. Knowing the nature of the threat, he could act. He turned back toward the camp. "We'll clear out," he told Len Renault.

But he had no intention of abandoning their diggings for good.

There was more gold in the gulch than the two of them could take out in a year's time. Jim knew that he would come back—soldiers or no soldiers, Indians or no Indians . . . . With Renault's help, he cached their mining tools and camp gear and most of their provisions among a tangle of rocks and brush. If their luck held out, the stuff would still be there when they returned.

"This crazy business won't last," Jim said to Renault. "One of these days the gold-seekers will come by the thousands, and there won't be soldiers enough to hold them off."

He slipped on the gray's halter and cinched on its pack saddle. The pack was light, and that was all to the good. It was made up of their bedrolls, a flour-sack filled with grub, and the rawhide pouch containing their dust. Jim took up his rifle, gave one last regretful look around, then nodded as Renault said edgily, "We'd better get moving."

They headed south through the gulch, the direction taken by the fleeing Mel Archer, and it extended for a half-mile before its walls closed in to a narrow passage. There was rough going outside the gulch, and no definite trail. Jutting rock formations and giant boulders slowed their pace. They had to force a way through patches of brush and skirt deeply eroded gullies. They were on the trail for perhaps three hours when, climbing a steep slope, Len Renault fell and went tumbling downward. His fall started a small landslide. When it let up, Jim heard his partner groaning.

"You hurt, Len?"

"My leg. It feels like it's broken," Renault wailed. He had his tenderfoot fears, and they got control of him now. His voice sharpened. "You won't leave me, Jim? You won't leave me here—alone?"

Jim scrambled down to him.

He bent over the sprawled man, asking, "Which leg?" It was the left leg, and Renault groaned again when Jim's fingers probed at it. Jim's guess was that no bones were broken, that it was merely a sprain. But that could be painful, so painful that a man couldn't walk. Jim said, "I'll bring the horse down. You'll have to ride."

Returning with the gray, he re-arranged the pack and then helped Renault mount. He handed up the man's rifle, then started up the slope once more, towing the animal by its halter rope. The footing was bad. Gravel, shale and small rocks slid down behind them. But they topped the slope, and Jim, pausing to get his breath, said, "It's easier going, from here on."

Then he heard it.

The clatter that cavalry made when on the move.

Jim swore. Their luck hadn't held out, after all. The soldiers were either on Mel Archer's trail or had learned from the men already taken prisoner that they would find other prospectors by trailing south. Despite the rough terrain, they were traveling fast. And now, to make matters worse, a crystal clear moon broke suddenly from the clouds. It became almost as bright as daylight. Jim saw the soldiers then—five of them—less than a quarter mile behind.

He moved back to Renault, and said, "It's no use. If we were both mounted and you hadn't a hurt leg, we could make a run for it. But—"

Something made him look up.

Renault had swung his rifle up like a club, with a two-handed grip on the barrel. No look of panic was on the man's face. Instead, Jim Logan saw, in that split second, the deliberate look in his partner's eyes. He realized that this had been planned, even before Renault knew that the soldiers were following them. He tried to step back, tried to bring his own rifle up, but the blow was already launched.

Jim's hat did little to cushion it.

His skull felt split open, his knees buckled. He began to fall, and couldn't regain his balance. He tumbled down the slope—somersaulting first, then rolling like a log. He jarred against a rock. It gave way, started pitching downward. A slide started, and Jim went along with it. He went all the way down, and when he came to a stop, his brain was reeling. He tried to pick himself up, but he was too dazed to get farther than his hands and knees. The soldiers found him like that, and one, the sergeant, growled, "Well, he's the one that got away from Hubbard's Gulch."

They'd been tailing Mel Archer.

They hadn't sighted Len Renault.

He had vanished from the crest of the slope, and was safe.

II

THE SOLDIERS TOOK THEIR prisoners to Fort Laramie. There, six of the miners were released on parole after giving their word that they would not return to the forbidden Black Hills. The seventh, Jim Logan, was held in the guardhouse. Jim refused to follow the example of the other prisoners, and the Army officers had an idea that a taste of confinement would change his mind.

They explained to him that the Indian Bureau and certain busy-body organizations back East were demanding that all miners found in the Black Hills be shot or imprisoned. The Army didn't want to take such severe measures, Jim was told, so it was up to him to be reasonable.

Jim wasn't being reasonable. His anger wouldn't let him.

He remained in the guardhouse, for he wasn't going to give his word only to break it as soon as he was released. He would return to the Hills. He knew that Len Renault would go back, and he meant to pay the man back for what he'd done. Renault might be tenderfoot, but he was devilishly tricky—and a thief. The man had gotten away with more than five thousand dollars worth of shot gold, half of it Jim's property, and, along with revenge, Jim wanted his share of the gold. He was sure that Renault's greed would take him back to their diggings, and Jim, when the Army got tired of holding him, would find him there.

Jim spent three days in the guardhouse, then the fourth morning he was escorted to Headquarters by a corporal. He stood before a pudgy, florid-faced officer who sat behind a desk. The officer was Captain Ames, and he eyed Jim with impatience.

"Why be stubborn?" he demanded. "This isn't getting you or the Army anywhere. Give me your word that you won't go prospecting in the Black Hills, and you can walk out of here a free man."

"Sorry, sir," Jim said flatly. "But I won't lie to you."

"I appreciate your being honest with me," Ames said. "But it forces me to do something I don't like."

"You mean—?"

"I mean that I've got to send you to prison."

Arguing that he was a civilian did Jim no good. The Army was the only law-enforcement body in the territory, and it was as strict with civilians as with military personnel. In company with two Army deserters, Jim was taken from Laramie under armed guard. They were hauled in an Army ambulance, and they were given no opportunity to escape. The escort had orders to shoot to kill if the prisoners made a break.

On the way to the military prison at Fort Russell, a few miles from Cheyenne, Jim saw bustling activity. All sorts of outfits—wagons, pack trains, men afoot—were on the roads. There were small camps scattered everywhere. The soldiers of the escort talked to some of the men met along the way. The long expected gold rush into the Black Hills was about to start.

Cheyenne was swarming with gold-seekers, the boomers stated. They were coming in by the hundreds, by the thousands. Once the movement got underway, it would be a stampede that no soldiers could stop . . . .

This was mid-summer when Jim Logan was on his way to prison, because he had refused to give his word of honor that he wouldn't have been able to keep.

During the monotonous days and nights in prison, Jim heard that the rush had

gotten underway. Word trickled in through the stockade walls. Perhaps the prisoners exaggerated in rehashing the news, but certainly a whole army of gold-seekers swarmed where only a handful of prospectors had been before. Camps were mushrooming up, Jim Logan heard. A steady stream of freight rigs was on the road. Lumber was being hauled north to be built into rockers. There were diggings in every gulch, and men were getting rich hand-over-fist. It was late summer and early fall when such news filtered into the prison.

It was early in November when Jim was taken before the prison's commanding officer, Major Beekman. Jim clutched at hope, thinking that he was to be released, but the major hadn't that in mind.

He said, "Logan, there's been a young lady here to see you. Since she is not a relatives, rules wouldn't permit it."

Jim said, "A lady?" He was puzzled.

Beekman nodded. "Since it was urgent that she get in touch with you, I suggested that she write a letter," he said, and picked up an unsealed envelope from his desk. "I suggest that you write a reply to it."

Jim took the envelope, found the letter inside written in a neat feminine script. He read: "Dear Mr. Logan — It is urgent that I locate my fiance, Mr. Len Renault, who came West from Baltimore about a year ago. His last letter to me was mailed from Cheyenne, where I am staying, but since my arrival, last week, he is not to be located. I have met a man who informed me that you were engaged in a gold-seeking venture with Mr. Renault and left Cheyenne with him. I heard about your being in prison, so am trying to get in touch with you in this manner. I would be deeply grateful if you can advise me of my fiance's whereabouts. Respectfully, Miss Helen Amberton."

Jim returned the letter to the desk.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I don't know Renault's whereabouts."

"When and where did you last see him?"

"In the Black Hills, the night I was arrested," Jim said. Sudden anger gripped him. "That was four months ago," he

SONG-WRITERS ATTENTION

The amazing demand for phonograph records, accelerated by countless Juke-Boxes, warrants your immediate investigation. We are offering New Writers the rare opportunity of having a celebrated "Hit" composer furnish music on reduced percentage basis for any likely poems received this month. The "Petrillo Ban" does not affect us.

RECOLA RECORDING CO., Box 987FH, Hollywood 28, Calif.

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Send your Poems today for Free Examination to

J. CHAS. McNEIL
A.B. MASTER OF MUSIC
510-FH So. Alexandria Los Angeles 5, Calif.

AMAZING MAGIC TRICK
Vanishing Card

Show it—then pitch it up into the air—its now completely disappeared, yet when you reach into a spectator's pocket you produce the same card—it's complete, ready to perform, easy to do, price only

—"THE MAGICIAN"— **25c**

2463 F-Kensington Avenue, Phila. 25, Pa.

WANT NEW FRIENDS?

ARE YOU LONELY?

Find them through correspondence. Nation-Wide contacts. Send 3¢ stamp for free details.

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU, Dept. 30, Box 157, G.P.O., New York 1

KEEP A FIRM GRIP ON YOUTH at 45-55-65

Pep up to Win

If you are losing nerve force, pep, energy, ambition—and a full, firm youthful grip on life—it may be for want of enough vital elements often needed AFTER 40. One of America's great Laboratories has now produced JOY TABLETS. This dependable new VITAMINIZED Tonic and BITTERS with Real ORGANIC Iron is intended for ADULTS ONLY. In One Night it can begin to ACT. Full three weeks' supply of JOY TABLETS—taken three times a day—must bring tremendous increase in Nerve, Force, Energy and Power to any man or woman past 40—and thoroughly satisfy—or NO CHARGE. Your money back if not positively delighted 100 per cent. Nothing else the same. So, get JOY TABLETS today. Send $1.98 Cash, Check or Money Order and receive JOY TABLETS in plain wrapper (postage prepaid). Or if you prefer, order C.O.D. and pay postman $1.98 plus postage and C.O.D. fees. JOY PRODUCTS, 900 Westside Ave., Dept. 91, JERSEY CITY, N. J.

went on. "I've been locked up ever since. I've committed no crime. I was caught in the Hills, sure, but since then thousands of men have gone there. Where's the justice of it, Major?"

"I had nothing to do with your being brought here," Beekman said.

"Still, you're keeping me here," Jim snapped. "And you could do something to get me released. Hell; I don't want to grow old in this place!"

"You're right, Logan," Beekman said. "I'll get in touch with Captain Ames at Fort Laramie."

"How long will it take?"

"Not long. I'll send a letter out with the next courier."

THE MAJOR kept his word. A week later Jim Logan was once more a free man. He hitched a ride to Cheyenne on a freight rig. He found the town booming. It swarmed with miners from far-off diggings and boomers planning to be miners. It was over-run with outfitters, gamblers, promoters, hardcases, and the usual gay ladies. Stores and eating-places could hardly handle the trade. Saloons were jam-packed night and day. Outfits were pulling out every day, every hour, and still more gold-seekers and parasites arrived. Ranchers were reaping a harvest selling horses. Prices were sky-high, but money circulated dizzily.

Jim's first stop was the Warren Bank. A collection of nuggets and dust was on display in the bank's window, with an ever-changing group of people viewing it through the glass. The bank was busier than Jim had ever seen it, and he had to wait long for his turn at the teller's window. He asked, "How much is in my account?"

The amount was ten dollars and fifty-seven cents.

He'd hoped it would be more.

Drawing the money out, Jim left the bank and fell in with the surge of people and traffic along the streets. He caught himself looking for a face, Len Renault's face, and knew that was useless. Renault wouldn't be wasting time here in Cheyenne. The man would be up in the hills, panning for gold. *Or maybe not,* Jim told himself. It might be that by now the woman, Miss Amberton, had gotten in touch with Renault—and he had come here to join her. Jim decided to look her up. If she hadn't located Renault, or if she had left Cheyenne, he would have to get an outfit together, somehow, and head north to make his search in the Hills.

He'd need a horse, gear and provisions. Which required money. Jim fingered the scanty funds in his pocket, and wondered how he would get hold of the necessary amount. The few dollars he possessed wouldn't go far. He needed a bath, a haircut, a shave, and a square meal. Luckily, he had some spare shirts and a brown corduroy suit, a good hat and an extra pair of boots in a warbag checked at the National House. He could pick them up while asking at the hotel if Miss Amberton was staying there, and change from the rough clothes he'd worn on the prospecting trip and during his stay in prison.

He turned into the false-fronted National, and found fat Mark Lyle, the proprietor, behind the desk. Lyle produced the Warbag, and said, "Yes, Miss Amberton is a guest. Room One-o-seven. She came here to marry that dude, Len Renault, Jim. I told her that you'd gone on a prospecting trip with him. You got word of him?"

"No. I was hoping she had."

"She hadn't when I talked to her yesterday."

"Well, this is another day," Jim said, and headed for the stairs.

He didn't know what to expect, but when Miss Amberton opened the door to 107 she was something of a surprise. She was young and attractive, and so obviously a properly brought-up lady that Jim Logan couldn't believe that she knew much about the man she was to marry.

SHE WAS a tall girl, hardly more than twenty, with tawny blonde hair. She was fashionably dressed, in becoming dark green, and Jim saw that there also was green, tiny flecks of it, in the gray depths of her eyes. She gazed at him uncertainly, and Jim, introducing himself, was uncomfortably aware of his appearance. In need of barbering, of soap and water, of

decent clothes, he must have looked disreputable to her. But mention of his name made Helen Amberton brighten.

"You've heard from Len, Mr. Logan?"

"I'm sorry, no. But I thought that perhaps you——"

She shook her head, bit down on her lower lip as though to hide its quivering. Her disappointment was great. She invited Jim in, and then said, "I sent several letters to the Black Hills, thinking that he might have stayed there after you were arrested. I received no reply. I questioned freighters and soldiers returning from the Hills, and none saw Len there—or even knew him."

She paused, and her hands were tightly clasped before her.

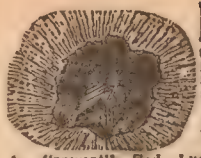
"Do you, Mr. Logan, believe that—well, that he's dead?"

"No. I'm sure he's alive," Jim said flatly, and saw her relief. He explained a part of it, carefully avoiding all mention of how it happened that he had been caught by the soldiers while Renault got away. For some reason, he didn't want to tell this girl what sort of a partner Len Renault had been. "Len got away with our dust," he finished up. "I'm going hunting for him."

"You are?" Helen Amberton said, suddenly excited. "Could you—would you—take me with you?"

Jim was jolted. He hadn't imagined that this girl might be contemplating a trip into the Hills. She was far out of her world just by being here in Cheyenne. And north of Cheyenne was no semblance of the civilization she was accustomed to. For a moment, Jim was convinced that he should turn her down. His argument could be that the trip was not one a woman should attempt, but she could point out that there were women with the outfits leaving Cheyenne every day. He could tell her that they weren't her kind of women, but that wouldn't convince her. Besides, if she was determined enough, she could find somebody else to take her north. He was sure that she would do that, now that she had his assurance that Renault was alive. But something more decided Jim.

Renault wasn't heard of because he'd

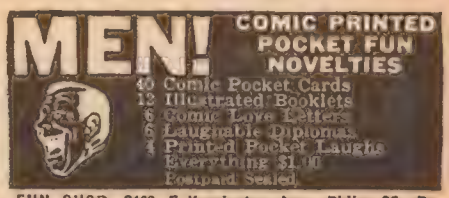


BELIEVE IN LUCK?-$

Carry a pair of GENUINE BRAHMA RED LIVE HIGHLY MAGNETIC LODESTONES! Legend reputes, Occult Oriental ancients superstitiously carried two Live Lodestones as MOST POWERFUL MAGNETIC "LUCKY" CHARMS, one to "attract" Good Luck in Money, Games, Love, Business, Work, etc., the other to "prevent" Bad Luck, Losses, Evil, Trouble, Harm, etc. Believe in Luck? Carry a Pair of these curious Genuine Brahma Red Live Lodestones! We make no supernatural claims. $1.97 Postpaid for the two, with all information. 28c extra if C.O.D. Send $1.97 and save 28c. Satisfaction GUARANTEED or Money Returned. Order yours NOW!

ASTROL CO., Dept. 45, Main P. O.
Box 72, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

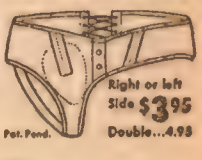
NOTICE! Beware of Imitations! We absolutely GUARANTEE these Genuine Brahma Lodestones are ALIVE! We believe they are just what you want, the REAL THING—POWERFUL DRAWING, Extra Highly Magnetic! Fully Guaranteed! Copyright'37-A. Co.



FUN SHOP, 2463 F-Kensington Ave., Phila. 25, Pa.

RUPTURE-EASER

A strong, form fitting, washable support. Back lacing adjustable. Snaps up in front. Adjustable leg strap. Soft, flat groin pad. No steel or leather bands. Unexcelled for comfort. Also used as after operation support For men or women. Mail orders give measure around the lowest part of the abdomen. Specify right or left side or double.



PIPER BRACE CO.
308 East 12th Dept. FH-3 Kansas City 6, Mo.

Rheumatic Arthritic Sufferers!

Rumal Ointment Costs You *Nothing* If This External Treatment Doesn't Relieve The Pain *Within Minutes*

Mr. I. K., Wilmington, Del., advises every one suffering from Rheumatic Pains to try RUMAL Ointment. He says, "GOD BLESS YOU FOR RUMAL."

If you have tried everything to relieve those annoying pains of Rheumatism, Arthritis, Sciatica without results—

Here's what we want you to do. Try Rumal Ointment (a doctor's formula that has helped thousands suffering from rheumatic aches and pains), entirely at our risk and expense.

Remember—you don't risk a penny by trying Rumal—you pay only if it brings you relief. SEND NO MONEY. Just your name and address. When postman brings you Rumal deposit $2 with him. Then use Rumal Ointment as directed. If you don't get blessed relief within minutes, tell us and you'll get your money back by return mail.

RUMAL MEDICINAL PRODUCTS
206 Division Street, Dept. 169, New York 2, N. Y.

changed his name. He'd taken an alias against the day when Jim Logan would start hunting him. It was going to be hard to smoke the man out, with all these thousands of boomers stampeding into the Black Hills, but with the girl along — well, Jim was sure that once Renault knew of his fiancee's presence, he would come seeking her. Like a bear nosing out some honey!

"There's one hitch," Jim said. "I'll have to travel light."

"I won't be a burden to you, Mr. Logan."

"I didn't mean that. I'm broke. I'll have trouble outfitting."

She smiled, and said easily, "I'll pay my share. I'm well able to. How much will an outfit cost?"

Jim didn't like that. He had his pride, and a man didn't take money from a woman. But he told himself that it would be but a loan. He would pay her back as soon as he'd collected his share of the dust from Renault. He gave her an estimate, and Helen Amberton wrote out a draught in his name on the Warren Bank

DESPITE the rush of buyers for gear and provisions, Jim got his outfit together before the day was over and at fairly reasonable prices. His being known to the established, pre-boom merchants helped. His provisions were the usual trail staples: flour and bacon, coffee and sugar. He bought blankets for himself and Helen, a tent for the girl's privacy, an axe, cooking utensils, and matches. He ran into a snag on horses; there wasn't a single animal for sale in Cheyenne that day. Jim had to go out to Matt Yeager's ranch on Broken Rib Creek. He knew Yeager well, and acquired two saddle horses and a mare for pack. The rancher also sold him saddles, one a side-saddle which had belonged to his daughter who, now married, had moved to Denver.

It was nearly dark when he got back to town. Stabling the horses at Rigg's livery, he picked up his warbag, which he'd left at Payson & Dunn's store, where his outfit was waiting, and went to Glennon's barber shop. It was an hour later that he emerged, barbered and scrubbed and wearing his good clothes. He felt like a different man, and the mirror at Glennon's had showed him that he looked pretty good. He was a lean six-footer with an angular face, but there were plenty of homelier men walking Cheyenne's dirt streets.

He went over to the National House, climbed the stairs, knocked on the door of one-o-seven. When Helen Amberton opened, she didn't know him at first. He saw her surprise, noted how she looked him up and down.

"I just wanted to tell you that the outfit's ready," he said. "We can pull out in the morning."

"You work fast," she replied. "But I'll be ready."

There didn't seem to be more for them to say. But Jim stood there, hat in hand, and Helen remained in the doorway. Suddenly Jim knew that he'd been missing something for a long time, a woman's companionship. He realized that here indeed was an attractive woman, one that any man would want to know better. He said, "I haven't had supper. If you haven't, maybe we could have it together."

There was just a brief hesitation, in which, Jim was certain, she was remembering that she was engaged to Len Renault. Then, making up her mind, Helen said, "Why not? You're Len's friend. I'm sure he wouldn't mind. I'll be just a moment."

It took her five minutes, at least, and Jim guessed that she was primping a little. They went downstairs, entered the crowded dining-room with Helen's hand on his arm. He saw how many of the men in the room stared at his companion, but he didn't need their admiring looks to tell him that he had a very attractive companion. Jim knew and felt that. In fact, he was beginning to suspect that it would be easy for him to lose his head over Helen Amberton.

He didn't feel guilty about it, either. Len Renault had robbed him of his share of the dust, and it would be only fair exchange if he tried to rob Renault of his fiancee!

It was the most enjoyable meal Jim Logan had had in a long time.

IT WAS raining in the morning, a drizzle out of a leaden sky at first and then, after Jim Logan reached the livery stable, heavy downpour. He stepped into the cubby-hole office, told the stableboy to fetch out his horses. Hank Riggs, the proprietor was starting a fire in his little office stove, and said, "Don't like the dampness it creeps into my bones."

"This rain going to last?" Jim asked, as he paid for his horses' keep.

"For a long spell," Riggs replied.

Jim grinned. "How do you know, Hank?"

Riggs pointed to a Hostetter's Almanac on his cluttered desk. "It says so," he said with great faith.

The rain let up by nine o'clock, through the sky remained sullen, and by that time Jim had his sorrel mare under pack. Before leaving Payson & Dunn's store, he bought a Winchester rifle and a box of shells. He still had his Colt sixgun and cartridge belt, it having been returned to him when he was released from prison. He mounted the big gelded gray he'd picked out of Yeager's string for himself, and, leading the pack horse and the dun rigged with a side-saddle, went around to the National House. The streets were sticky mud.

Helen was waiting in the lobby. He'd told her last night to travel as light as she could, and Jim was pleased to see that she'd followed his suggestion. She had but one traveling bag. She was wearing a dark brown riding habit such as, Jim supposed, was fashionable back East. It was becoming to her. Her welcoming smile was very friendly.

"The weather's not good," Jim told her. "But I thought you'd want to start out, anyway."

She nodded and said that she was anxious to start out, and Jim picked up her bag. Outside, he tied it atop the mare's pack and then helped Helen mount. He stepped to the gray's saddle, caught up the pack rope, and said, "Let's go."

It started to rain again as they rode from Cheyenne, a heavy downpour now. But they weren't the only ones traveling in the bad weather. The road was crowded with north-bound traffic, freight outfits and

LAW...
STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. More Ability: More Prestige: More Money We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW.
LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 3481-L Chicago 5, Ill.

Start Your Own Business
on our capital. Always your own boss. Hundreds average $6,000 to $25,000 annual sales year after year. We supply stocks, equipment on credit. 200 home necessities. Selling experience unnecessary to start. Wonderful opportunity to own pleasant, profitable business backed by world-wide industry. Write:
RAWLEIGH CO., Dept. C-U-FIH, Freeport, Illinois

LONELY HEARTS
Let us help you find real happiness. Join our old reliable club. 42 years of dependable, confidential service. Correspondents most everywhere. Many with means, seeking congenial mates. Proven results. Photos, descriptions free.
STANDARD CLUB, BOX 207, GRAYS LAKE, ILL.

TOOTHACHE?
"Since 1888"
Quick relief with Dent's. Use Dent's Tooth Gum or Dent's Tooth Drops for cavity toothaches. Use Dent's Dental Poultice for pain or soreness in gums or teeth. At all drug stores.
DENT'S TOOTH GUM TOOTH DROPS DENTAL POULTICE

New FALSE PLATE METHOD

Transforms Old, Loose, Cracked or Chipped Plates into NEW LUSTROUS BEAUTY-PINK PLASTIC PLATES ... No Impression Needed
No need now to pay a high price for a new plate! Our new *scientific* "FALSE PLATE METHOD" saves you money and duplicates your old, unsightly and unsanitary plate into a new, light-weight, lustrous, beauty-pink plastic plate with your own teeth. Missing teeth are replaced with new, matching teeth. Simple instructions tell you how to make your LOOSE plate tight-fitting before duplication.
LOW AS $10
SEND NO MONEY Just write for our money saving *False Plate Method* that gives you a new plate within hours. Guaranteed.
WEST DENTAL LABORATORY
127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 100 Chicago 2, Ill.

boomer outfits. Jim hit a pace that overtook and passed the slow-moving wagons.

This was the Fort Laramie road, and it had been widened to a full half mile by the thousands of teams that traveled it during the past few months. And now, because of the rain, it was one long quagmire. The rain did not fall continuously, but by hour-long showers day and night that kept the mud in a fluid state and made travelers uncomfortable.

That first day proved to Jim Logan that Helen Amberton was not as frail as she appeared. She did not complain, though her clothes were constantly damp. She did not protest that the day's ride was too long. She explained to Jim that she had learned to ride in the Maryland hills, but he was sure that she'd never been in the saddle for so long a period. He made a noon halt at Carlin's ranch, but that first night they had to camp in the open. He was glad that he had bought the tent for Helen.

The rain fell intermittently all the second day, but the third was better. The sun appeared late in the afternoon, and that evening in camp, as he built a fire and rustled supper, Jim watched—covertly, of course—Helen sit in the fading sunlight and fuss with her hair. She took it down, brushed it vigorously after rubbing it with a towel, and it gleamed like dull gold.

She looked up and caught him staring at her, and Jim saw the color heighten in her cheeks. He looked away, feeling a little guilty, and did not glance toward her again until the meal was ready. By then Helen had her hair braided and the plaits coiled tightly about her head. He said, "Grub's ready," and she rose from the rock that formed a seat before her tent and came to the fire.

It was then that Jim really knew the truth.

A man couldn't travel with such a girl and not want her.

He avoided looking at her while they ate, and after the meal, he rolled and lighted a cigarette and tried to ignore the surging felings within him. But Helen lingered by the fire tonight, and Jim began to wonder if her emotions might not be astir like his own. As if in answer, Helen said, "It's been so long since I saw Len, I have difficulty remembering him. When one thinks about it, a year is a big part of a lifetime."

Jim thought, *So you're thinking of him,* and knew what jealousy was.

When he remained silent, Helen went on, "Len wanted to make his fortune before we married. He wants to be rich. That's important to him. I suppose that I shouldn't be coming to join him, but—well, I was left alone by the death of my mother. I had to turn to the only person close to me. I wrote to Len a week before I left home, but he musn't have received the letter." She smiled waveringly. "Sometimes I feel that I've done wrong—that I should have waited. Jim, do you think that Len will be displeased and maybe angry with me?"

Jim said, "How should I know?" almost gruffly.

"Well, how would you feel if your fiancee followed you so far?"

Jim looked squarely at her. "You want a truthful answer?" he asked. Then added, on seeing her nod, "If you were my fiancee, you wouldn't need to travel so far to marry me." He saw that she was taken aback. He tossed his cigarette into the fire. "We'd better turn in. Tomorrow will be another hard day."

Later, lying in his blankets by the fire, Jim felt like a fool for having blurted out how he'd come to feel about her. He began to wonder what his feelings for Helen Amberton would do to his plans for settling matters with Len Renault. He'd sworn a hundred times while in prison that he would kill the man!

III

JIM GAVE EACH OF THE HORSES a careful currying each evening, for now, beyond Fort Laramie, he saw dead animals—mostly mules, but a few horses too—that had been stricken by mud fever. The hair along an animal's belly and from hock to fetlock became so caked with mud that the pores were clogged and sweating was halted. Teamsters who neglected to use the currycomb found their animals coming down with the so-called fever.

The road was still crowded, and in one

long freighting outfit was a woman wielding reins and blacksnake whip. She wore a Stetson, a neckscarf, flannel shirt, pants and boots, and she swore at her mules as expertly as a man. Helen's eyes widened at sight of this female mule-skinner, and Jim, chuckling, said, "They call her Calamity Jane."

They forded the Upper Niabrara, crossed the flat country beyond, camped one night by the Cheyenne River, and finally Jim pointed to a haze in the far distance. "The Black Hills," he said.

That same day they met a south-bound rig, a Studebaker wagon and mule team driven by a man named Eberts. Jim knew Eberts well, for the man had once worked for Matt Yeager. They stopped and talked, Jim introducing Eberts to Helen. He explained their reason for going to the Hills, and asked, "You hear anything of Renault up there?"

Eberts said that he hadn't, and added, "So many men in the Hils, you don't get to know all of them." He explained that he was going to Cheyenne to get his family. Eberts had had good luck along Deadwood Creek. He showed Jim and Helen a leg cut from an old pair of breeches. It was tied at top and bottom, and was filled with dust.

They made camp that night in hilly country, amid pines and quaking aspens, and Jim shot a white-tailed deer. He cut venison steaks for their supper, and gave the rest of the meat to a family of boomers camped nearby. In return, the boomers gave him some apples they'd bought from a passing freight outfit. The change of diet was a welcome one, and as darkness came, banjo music and singing voices rose from boomer camp. Helen listened to the music, became relaxed by the fire. She was in no hurry to go to her tent tonight, and Jim, keeping the fire blazing, was glad for her company. But a sudden noise in the surrounding brush startled her. She uttered a cry, jumped up, and caught hold of Jim's arm as he rose and moved close.

He'd seen what had caused the noise, and said, "It's only a sage hen," but Helen was slow in over-coming her fright. He could feel her trembling. It seemed only

ACCOUNTANT
BECOME AN EXPERT
Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn $9,000 to $10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book. "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."
LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 3481-H Chicago 5, Ill.

ARE YOU LONELY?
Thousands of lonely folk EVERYWHERE have found true happiness through introductions by mail. We will show you PROOF of results. Send NOW for FREE particulars in plain sealed envelope.
RAINBOW SERVICE, 110 W. Oak Avenue
Santa Rosa, Cal., Dept. FH

DATE BY MAIL
Everybody's doing it and liking it, especially our way. All ages, either sex, find it easy to locate their ideal among our NATION-WIDE members. Low rates, long service, large lists. FREE particulars.
E. M. SMITH
P. O. Box 375-FH, Waterville, New York

Free Book
RAISE HAMSTERS
The new wonder animals from Syria. Often called Toy Bears. Delightful pets. Everyone wants them. Laboratories need thousands. Clean, odorless. Raise anywhere. A profitable and interesting hobby or business. We furnish breeders and instructions. Write today for free book.
GULF HAMSTERY, 1516 BASIL ST., MOBILE, ALA.

Be Lonely No More!
Open Destiny's Door!
50c brings Cupid's Destiny, World's Greatest Social Publication, including coast-to-coast names and addresses; either sex. Captivating descriptions; sparkling pictures—widows, widowers, bachelors, beautiful girls desiring early marriage. (Year, bi-monthly, $2.00.) Mention your age.
DESTINY LEAGUE • Aberdeen 16 • Washington

LONESOME?
JOIN RELIABLE CLUB, established 1909
Members everywhere—beautiful girls, nurses, teachers, widows, businessmen, farmers seeking congenial mates. Many claim wealth. Dignified, dependable and sure, we get results. WRITE FOR INFORMATION AND DESCRIPTIONS FREE. SEALED.
THE EXCHANGE, 3827-72 Main, Kansas City, Mo.

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.
35 Years in Business
300,000 Satisfied Customers
THE NEWELL COMPANY
293 Clayton Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.
FREE BOOK

the natural thing to slip his arm about her and then, having gone so far, Jim lost his control. He put his other arm about her, drew her roughly against him, and kissed her upon the mouth.

He knew that she was startled. He himself was surprised. She stiffened, grew rigid, and her lips were unresponsive. Then there was a swift change. She was pliant in his arms, and her lips were as seeking as his own. That lasted for a brief instant, then Helen gasped, "No, don't!" She struggled against him. She shrank from him as soon as he released her. Helen looked frightened now.

"Jim we shouldn't let such a thing happen!" she gasped.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Because of Len Renault?"

Her frightened eyes widened even more. Something of his hate for Renault must have been in his voice. "He's your friend as well as my fiance," she said chokingly. She saw the rocky look on his face. "You act as though he shouldn't be considered, at all!"

Jim had held her in his arms and kissed her lips, and he no longer could doubt that he wanted her. He was as upset as Helen, and he said savagely, "To hell with Len Renault! It's time that you knew!" He saw how pale she had become, and that steadied him. "All right," he told her. "I won't force myself on you again. But no matter how I feel about you, it's not going to let Renault off easy for what he did to me."

"You hate him!"

"I hate him enough to kill him," Jim said, and turned from her.

IT WASN'T the same the next day. They ate breakfast, broke camp, took the trail in silence. They had been friends, now they were enemies. But somehow Jim wouldn't have undone what had brought them to this state of hostility. He wanted her to know why he was hunting Renault. It would prepare her for the showdown that would come when he and Renault met.

They reached the Hills late that day. Wagon and hoof tracks branched off the main road in a hundred places, showing that men were scrambling all through the new gold country. Jim kept to the road, however, for the gulch where he and Renault had panned for gold was deep in the hill country. Before sundown they sighted men grubbing in the earth and splashing in the streams.

The miners had built a dam and were working a string of six boxes, the sluices rigged with riffles drilled with one-inch auger holes. Mud and gravel was shoveled into the head box, then washed through the string by water from the dam. One man used a twelve-tined fork to keep the debris moving.

The gold settled in the interstices of the riffles, and would be gathered at the end of the day's work.

Jim questioned the man with the fork, but the name Renault merely drew a blank look. "Maybe you'll find him up at Deadwood," the miner said. "A town's sprung up there."

Jim said, "Well, thanks," and rode on with Helen.

He didn't head for Deadwood, but toward the gulch that Renault and he had worked. Half a hundred men were busy there now. They called it Lucky Cache Gulch, because some of them had found a cache of provisions and gear hidden among some brush and rocks. Jim didn't bother to say that he had been one of the two men who had made the cache. He asked about Renault, by name and by description, and drew a blank.

He decided to make night camp there in Lucky Cache Gulch, and later, after the evening meal, Helen spoke to him for the first time that day. "You won't find him," she said flatly. "He's not here in the Hills. You may as well stop searching."

"You'd like me to quit wouldn't you?" he retorted. "You'd like to get me off his trail." He shook his head. "I'm not quitting. He's here in the Hills, and I'll find him."

Helen gazed at him bleakly, saying nothing.

Jim said, "He's not worth your worrying about him. If he cared enough about you, he wouldn't have stayed away from you all this time—gold or no gold."

"No matter what you say against him, I know he meant no wrong."

"He planned to rob me of my share of the dust we'd panned. He'd have killed me, if those soldiers hadn't shown up when they did."

"I won't believe it," Helen said thickly. "I just won't believe it." She looked squarely at him. "I'm warning you now, Jim Logan—I'll do what I can to stop you from harming him!"

Jim could see that she meant it. She would stop at nothing to keep him from having his revenge on Renault!

They rode into the camp called Deadwood at noon the next day. A thousand men were already there, living in tents and in wickiups made of poles and brush. A few frame buildings were under construction, the lumber being freighted in, and some boomers were cutting logs for cabins. The camp sprawled through a narrow gorge, the walls of which were so close at one place that two wagons had difficulty in passing. Whiskey sellers and merchants did business in tents or off wagons. Promoters bustled about trying to sell mining claims and stock.

Jim Logan asked a score of men about Renault, but the man's name meant nothing and his description, as Jim gave it, could fit a half hundred men in Deadwood alone.

Whitewood and Deadwood creeks ran red from the sluicing, and plenty of color was being found. Jim was sure that Renault was here or close by, but he must have gazed at a thousand faces without seeing the one he sought. By sundown he was convinced that his man wasn't in Deadwood.

"I told you," Helen said. She looked very tired. She had been under a constant strain since learning why Jim wanted to find Renault. "I told you that he's not here in the Hills."

"There are other camps," Jim told her. "And plenty of other gulches."

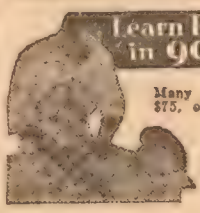
They left Deadwood, traveled three or four miles through the Hills before dusk, and came finally upon a man who'd set up a wagon-store by the side of the trail. The merchant, a gray-bearded old man, had picked a lonely spot. He had his

LONELY? WHY BE LONELY?

America's friendly club will arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Sealed Particulars FREE.

DIAMOND CIRCLE

BOX 1203, DEPT. 14 ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI



Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

Men and Women, 18 to 50

Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75, or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanitoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32 page illustrated Book. FREE—Now! The College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 993C, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11

MAKE FRIENDS

Don't be LONESOME. You can enjoy friendship and companionship with worthwhile and interesting persons. Personal, confidential service for lonely people. FREE particulars in sealed envelope. Sincere, lonesome folks write Social, Box 157-A, New York 11, N. Y.

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS

THE KIND MEN LIKE!

(VEST POCKET SIZE)

They are loaded with rare cartoons. Full of Fun and Humor. 20 DIFFERENT booklets sent prepaid for $1 in plain sealed wrapper. No C. O. D.'s.

GRAYKO, Dept. 1652. Box 520, G.P.O., N.Y.C. 1

WHY BE LONELY!

Let America's greatest introduction service find your ideal friend, sweetheart, or mate. Our amazingly different system has brought ideal love, friendship, and enduring happiness to thousands. Why not you? This method offers individual analysis and introduction to persons of your type. Sensational results—even when all other methods fail. Largest, most select membership. Sealed details FREE.

DR. MILES, Box 9265, Sta. S, Los Angeles 5, Cal.

LONESOME?

Let me arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Find yourself a sweetheart thru America's foremost select social correspondence club. A friendship letter society for lonely ladies and gentlemen. Members everywhere; CONFIDENTIAL introductions by letter; efficient, dignified and continuous service. I have made thousands of lonely people happy—why not you? Write for FREE sealed particulars.

EVAN MOORE P. O. BOX 933 JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

MATRIMONY UNLIMITED!

America's finest club for personalized, selective introductions offers unlimited opportunities to meet refined ladies and gentlemen (many wealthy). Write today (enclosed 10¢ coin) for over 40 actual photos and details, sealed—confidential. Mention age.

HOLLYWOOD "400"

P. O. Box 2349-FG, Hollywood 28, California

wares—cooking utensils, axes, shovels and miners' picks, and a miscellany of other gear boomers might buy—displayed beneath a canvas fly stretched on poles. His wagon was big and it was crammed with more merchandise. His horses were on a picket line. The man stepped forward with an old Harpers Ferry rifle in the crook of his arm as Jim and his companion rode up.

"Funny place for a business, friend," Jim said, by the way of greeting.

"Maybe it is," the merchant muttered. "But I aim to catch some trade from Hubbard's Gulch. It's only a mile through that pass yonder. The miners'll come here to buy, all right, rather than pay the thieving prices charged in the Gulch. I tried to set up a store there, but that no-good Walt Regan, who bosses the camp, had his gunhands run me out."

THIS WAS the second time Jim had heard of Regan bossing Hubbard's Gulch. He was convinced that a man like Len Renault wouldn't be working a claim under such a gun-rule, for Renault's greed would make him shy away from a camp that bled away miner's profits. But Jim asked the merchant if he happened to know Len Renault.

"Can't say that I do," came the reply. "I'm new in these parts. I came from Denver to get in on this gold rush. Parsons is my name."

"Mine's Logan."

"Glad to know you. You and your missus are welcome to stay over."

"Thanks. We've been looking for a place to camp."

Jim selected a site about a hundred feet beyond Parsons' store-camp, and Helen said, "Did you have to let him think I was your wife?"

Jim ignored her anger, and replied, "Easier than to explain." He helped her dismount, and she drew away from him as soon as her feet touched the ground.

He said, "All I want of Renault is my share of the gold we panned. I figured that I'd kill him for what he'd done to me, but—well, I'll take my dust and let you have him."

Helen's eyes had grown round. "Why?" she asked. "Why have you changed your mind?"

"Because of you, of course."

"Meaning—?"

"You should know what I mean," he said sourly. "A man can't be with you day and night, and not get notions about you. I'm saying that Renault is no good. But since he's what you want, you'll have him and—"

He broke off as a rider loomed out of the darkness from the direction of Hubbard's Gulch. The horseman paused briefly, looked over Jim's camp, then rode on toward Parson's place. He halted there, and loud talk rose between him and the merchant. The man's face had been obscure in the gloom, but Jim had noticed his horse in the glow of the campfire. Suddenly he remembered that horse. It was a big gray with the IC brand added to its US mark. It was the condemned cavalry mount he had owned and lost to Len Renault.

Jim jumped up, strode toward Parsons' camp.

The rider was a lanky youth, tough and sullen looking, and he was saying, "Regan's not fooling, bub. You pack up and git. If you're here this time tomorrow night, we'll come and burn your whole damn' outfit."

Parsons had his rifle levelled at the rider. Jim stepped between them, and said, "You're riding a stolen horse, friend. Maybe you'd better do some explaining."

He drew his gun as the young hardcase reached for his weapon.

Parsons yelped, "Watch him, Logan! He's Nat Kelso, a killer!" But Jim didn't need the warning. He had his gun cocked and levelled at Kelso's chest, and the hardcase, seeing how close to dying he was, let go of his gun and lifted his empty right hand shoulder high.

"Hold it, mister," he muttered. "You've got it wrong. I didn't steal this horse. I don't even claim to own it. I work for Walt Regan, the boss of Hubbard's Gulch, and he loaned me the gray."

"Regan own it?"

"That's the truth."

Jim didn't hear the rest of it.

He was thinking, *Regan is Len Renault!*

IV

JIM SAID THINLY, "GET OUT OF here, Kelso. Leave Parsons alone. You tell your boss that Jim Logan is coming to see him." He meant to say that he would be bringing Helen Amberton with him, but Kelso burst out, "You bet I'll tell him," and whirled his horse about. He rode off at a hard lope. Jim swore softly, turned back toward his camp. He almost collided with Helen. She'd followed him. She'd overheard what had been said, and she guessed what was in Jim's mind.

"This man can't be Len," she said shakenly. "Len isn't like Regan. Jim, you're wrong!"

"I'll make sure of that," Jim told her, going to saddle his horse.

Helen followed him, and said hollowly, "You promised me."

"And I keep my promises."

"Then you'll take me with you?"

He stared at her. She was still afraid that he meant harm to Renault. "All right," he said. He saddled both his own and her mount. When they were mounted and riding in the direction Kelso had taken, he asked, "What if Regan is Renault?"

"I don't know," Helen said thickly.

They rode in silence after that. The trail was easily followed, despite the darkness, and in less than an hour, they emerged from a cut in the hills and saw the lights and campfires of Hubbard's Gulch dotting the night. It was a smaller camp than Deadwood, but it was a noisy one. Drunken voices yelped, some sang to the accompaniment of fiddles and banjos. A gunshot blasted at the far end. Just beyond the gulch entrance, Jim and the girl came to a roaring creek. It was no more than ten feet across, but too swift to ford. There was a plank bridge nearby, with three men lounging upon it.

Jim turned toward the span, Helen following, and one of the men said clearly, "That's the son." It was Nat Kelso.

The three moved forward, blocked the bridge's entrance, and Kelso said to Jim Logan, "Walt Regan says you're a liar, mister. He says you never owned that gray horse."

"No matter," Jim said. "Where will I find this Regan?"

He got no answer.

Nat Kelso said, "All right, Chris," and one of the others swung his arm up—and forward. A blacksnake whip was in his hand, it lashed out at Jim.

Jim took the blow, and it was a vicious one that cut him across the face. He might have flung up his arms and warded it off, but that would have left him defenseless for what more was to come. He grabbed out his sixgun as the pain of the whip-blow cut through him, then yelled, "Ride out, Helen!" Then guns were blazing.

Nat Kelso got in the first shot, a wild one. The man next to him fired almost at the same time, his slug burning Jim's horse across the rump. Spooked, the dun began to buck. Jim dropped from the saddle as the animal reared high. His left ankle turned, throwing him to his knees. The whip caught him again, across the shoulders, but his own gun was blasting now. He targetted the whip-wielder with his second shot, and the man went over backwards.

Kelso yelled, "Get him, Pete! Get him!"

There was panic in Kelso's voice, and that panic made his shooting wild. Jim lurched to his feet, firing twice more, and Kelso staggered. The man Pete was steadier. He creased Jim along the left side with a slug, then readied a finished shot. Jim fired and missed, then, his last shot gone, lunged forward and struck out with the gun. Pete's shot blazed, and Jim felt powder burn him. Then his gun crashed against the tough's face. Reeling back, Pete hit the bridge's guard-rail and toppled over it. His scream rang out as he fell, but choked off abruptly as the rushing water closed over him. He broke surface, thrashing wildly, twenty feet downstream. The water swept him away.

Nat Kelso was still on his feet despite his wound. He clung to his gun but did not bring it to bear. He'd had plenty of chance to down Jim while Jim was occupied with Pete, but he'd let it slip by. Jim now saw why. Helen was holding a small revolver. She was covering Kelso from the saddle. Jim was a little dazed, but he crossed to Kelso and took the gun from him. He flung the weapon into the creek.

The shooting had roused the entire camp, of course, and men came running up by the score. They crowded across the bridge, asking questions, and one burly red-bearded miner, judging the situation, exclaimed, "Stranger, if you and your woman whipped those three toughs, this camp is yours for the asking. They helped Walt Regan rule this camp. Helped him bleed it white!"

Another man bent over the sprawled Chris, and muttered, "This one's dead." He straightened and stared at Nat Kelso. "And by damn, this one ain't got his gun. He'd do to stretch a rope. That must've been Pete Shannon that was washed downstream. Boys, this is our chance to get rid of that tinhorn Regan!"

Like any crowd, this one, which was still growing, was slow to consider revolt against authority. Against even self-enacted authority. But here and there a man grunted agreement or nodded approval. And one, the red-bearded miner, said, "A rope for Regan as well as for Kelso!"

Jim glanced at Helen, saw her frightened eyes.

He said loudly, "One moment, friends. I think Regan's right name is Renault. If it is, he changed it so I'd have trouble finding him. This Renault robbed me of some dust, and I want it back. This lady came all the way from Baltimore to marry this Renault."

"You want us to let him go scot-free?" a man growled.

"If Regan is Renault, the lady and I have older claims on him than you men," Jim stated. "We'll take him away from Hubbard's Gulch—and keep him from coming back."

The several leaders of the slow-forming revolt didn't like it, but before they could protest, a commotion broke out at the rear of the crowd. A shout lifted, "It's Regan! Make way, boys, for the king of Hubbard's Gulch! Big Walt Regan wants to see what his gunhands did to that stranger!"

Regan must have believed that his three hired toughs had dealt with Jim Logan. As the crowd parted for him, he

came striding across the bridge A couple lanterns now appeared, being passed forward from hand to hand, and there was some illumination. Walt Regan was a stocky man of medium height. He was rigged out in town clothes, the only man in all those hundreds so dressed. He moved with a swagger, thrusting contemptuously past miners lining the bridge. Jim Logan heard Helen's stifled cry, but he himself was not surprised to see Len Renault.

RENAULT was slow in sizing up the situation. He saw Nat Kelso but did not at once realize that the young tough was wounded and disarmed. Striding toward Kelso, Renault said savagely, "All that shooting for one man, Nat? Dammit, I told you—"

He saw Kelso's condition.

He whirled, uttered an incoherent exclamation on seeing Jim Logan. His ruddy face lost some of its color. A miner held a lantern high, and in its glow beads of sweat could be seen to form on Renault's face.

"Yes, I'm still alive," Jim said flatly. "And I want the dust you stole from me."

Renault swallowed visibly. "You'll get it," he said, trying to hold onto his courage. "I didn't mean to beat you out of it. Why, Jim, I saved it from those soldiers that night. You slipped and fell down that slope, and they caught you. Yeah; that's how it happened." He forced a grin of bravado. "Look; we're still partners. I'll take you in on my set-up here. It's a good thing. Better than panning for gold—"

"You're done here, Renault," Jim broke in.

"What—what do you mean?"

"The miners are sick of you."

Renault said contemptuously, "Those stupid fools! Why, they have to depend on my store for every mouthful of grub and every piece of gear—" Only then did he seem to realize that he was no longer backed by gunhands. But his shrewdness was as great as ever. "Side me, Jim," he said quickly, almost desperately. "I've got the only store and the only saloon we'll

World's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of THE SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the world's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Primitive Photos from Africa, Torture Photos from Asia, Strange Photos from Oceania and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 LARGE PAGES of Strange and Secret Photographs, each page 57 square inches in size.

1,000 PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the intimacy of the cameras you witness the exotic habits of every continent and the strangest customs, in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by these large pages of ONE THOUSAND PHOTOGRAPHS, including 130 full-page photos and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set
VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa
VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe
VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia
VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America
VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

5 PICTURE PACKED VOLUMES

The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and unusual photo, is the WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS, containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

Specimen Photos
Dress and Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
1,000 Strange and Secret Photos

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign and mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9¼ inches high, and opened, over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

Metro Publications, 363 Broadway, Dept. 1807, N. Y. 13, N. Y.
Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return books in 5 days for full refund of $1.98.

Name.....
Address.....
City.....Zone.....State.....

☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee.
Canadian and Foreign Orders—$2.50 in Advance.

allow in this camp. I've got plenty of dust—"

Jim broke in again saying, "They want to hang you, Renault."

Panic gripped Renault. He drew a gun from beneath his coat. And Helen cried, "Len! Len, don't—!"

Renault must have known from Nat Kelso's report that Jim was traveling with a woman, but only now did he realize that that woman was his fiancee. For an instant his face showed shock. Then he moved swiftly, lunging forward and grabbing Helen's mount by its headstrap.

"Try to lay a hand on me," he yelled, "and I'll shoot her!" He was crazy with fear. "I swear it! I'll kill her!"

It was Helen who made the next swift move. She pulled hard on the horse's reins, and the animal jerked around. Renault was pulled off balance, and before he could recover, Jim rushed at him. Renault fired one wild shot, then went down under Jim's rain of blows. Jim kicked the gun from his hand. Then the Hubbard's Gulch miners closed in.

No hand touched Len Renault. No threatening voice spoke.

The man darted one way and another, screaming hysterically. The miners formed a wall around him, with only one opening in it. In his blind panic, Renault rushed through that one opening. He plunged into the roaring waters of the creek, and his last scream was choked off in the middle. A miner yelled, "After him, boys! Make sure he doesn't climb out!"

The crowd swarmed along the creek banks.

Jim went to Helen and said gently, "I'm sorry, Helen. But he would have it no other way. Wait for me outside the gulch. I'm going to locate his headquarters and get back my dust. I'll follow you, then."

IT WAS MORNING, and Jim remained at his breakfast fire long after he'd eaten. Parsons, the merchant, was already breaking camp to go into Hubbard's Gulch and open up his store there. Helen was still in her tent. Finally Jim rose and crossed to the tent, and said, "Helen, I'm coming in."

She had her things packed, but sat on her bedroll staring at the tent's blank wall. She looked small and helpless and frightened.

"Tell me it was only a bad dream, Jim," she said hollowly.

"It wasn't a dream. You'll have to face it."

"But what—what will I do now?"

Jim too had been thinking of that. He had the answer ready. "I've got my dust," he said. "It's not a fortune, but it'll do for a start. I was a ranchhand before I started prospecting. Wyoming is good cattle country. I've a rancher-friend named Matt Yeager who'll help me stock a homestead. It'd be a home for you."

"You'd want me, Jim after the way I've treated you?"

"We could be married at Cheyenne."

"You're too kind to me," Helen said, but there was hope in her eyes. "I'll repay you, though. I'll be a good wife."

In a little while, they would start back to Cheyenne.

For the best in thrilling adventure and fast-action stories read Fiction House Magazines.

Look for the bulls-eye on the covers . . .

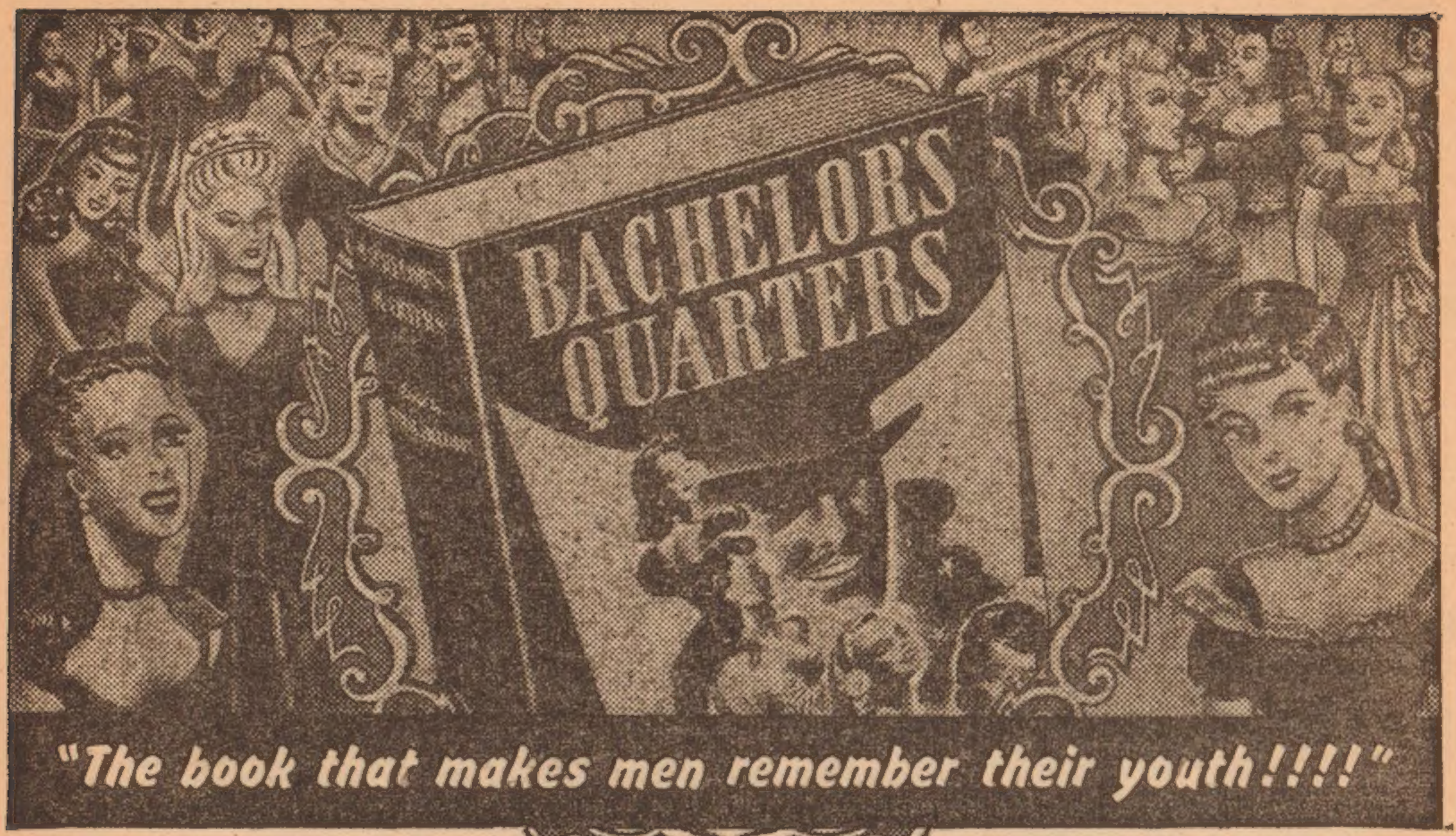
FIGHT	PLANET
ACTION	LARIAT
BASEBALL	FOOTBALL
NORTHWEST	FRONTIER
WINGS	JUNGLE

DETECTIVE BOOK

LOVE! MONEY! POWER!

All these can be yours! Handwriting reveals the hidden talents which will make you a success in your personal life. Get your individual analysis today! Send ten lines in your writing and $1.00 to—

SEYMOUR SCHNEID
1669 Norman St., Ridgewood 27, Queens, New York



764 PAGES OF RIB-TICKLING READING — 80 STORIES YOU WON'T SOON FORGET

TALES OF WOMEN AS YOU LIKE THEM
BY MEN WHO KNOW THEM BEST

Maybe you're a bachelor, or maybe you're a married man and the string leads to your wife's apron, but brother, you're going to learn about women on almost every page of "BACHELOR'S QUARTERS," the book that concentrates on the man's point of view. Every tale in this 764 page book is written by a master story-teller, by those who have understood and probed the deepest secrets of women as they really are. Here you will find sophisticated, worldly females, innocents, tigresses, designing, scheming women who can make shambles of a man's life . . . these and many more in the most story-packed book that ever kept you up nights. Read for 10 days FREE, at absolutely no risk. If you don't agree it is the most complete, most fascinating encyclopaedia of WOMEN you have ever read, it won't cost you a single cent. Rush the coupon today and get your copy while we still have one!

THE CRITICS LOVED IT!

Reviewed by many of the largest newer papers, BACHELOR'S QUARTERS has been widely acclaimed. You'll discover the reason yourself when you meet, between the covers of BACHELOR'S QUARTERS, some of the most unusual women ever offered you in print.

SEND NO MONEY

Enjoy this big book for 10 days' free trial. Meet Clarissa, Cosette, Rinty, Kate and her sisters-in-adventure without risk to your purse. Simply fill in and mail the free gift coupon. On arrival, pay the postman only $2.98 plus postage and C.O.D., or enclose $3.00 with the coupon and receive both books postpaid. We guarantee that BACHELOR'S QUARTERS will positively delight you or your MONEY BACK! Rush the coupon NOW!

Here's What Goes On In BACHELOR'S QUARTERS

THE DOCTOR & THE DOCTOR'S WIFE
Ernest Hemingway

JIMMY AND THE DESPERATE WOMAN
D. H. Lawrence

THE WOMAN WHO MADE ANATOLE FRANCE
Francis Gribble

THE MAN WITH ONLY FIVE WIVES
Admiral Mark Kerr

DUSKY RUTH
A. E. Coppard

THE HOUSE OF THE SINNER
Caradoc Evans

THE LADY WHO COULDN'T BLUSH
Catulle Mendes

THE GARMENTS OF A GIRL
J. Y. F. Cooke

THE HONEY-MOON SURPRISE
Clement Wood

LOVE AND A FUR COAT
Hjalmar Roderberg

and that's only the beginning!

Free WITH THIS COUPON...

Here's your opportunity to tour New York's famous Greenwich Village. This FREE copy of Greenwich Village with your order describes in detail homes of American artists, dwelling places of the poets, abode of the sophisticated. An interesting and fascinating trip awaits you as you tour through the pages expertly described by John Cournos ... rush coupon now and get your copy.

BILTMORE PUB., CO., 45 E. 17th St., N.Y.C. 3

Biltmore Publishing Co., Dept. F-133
45 East 17th St., New York 3, N.Y.

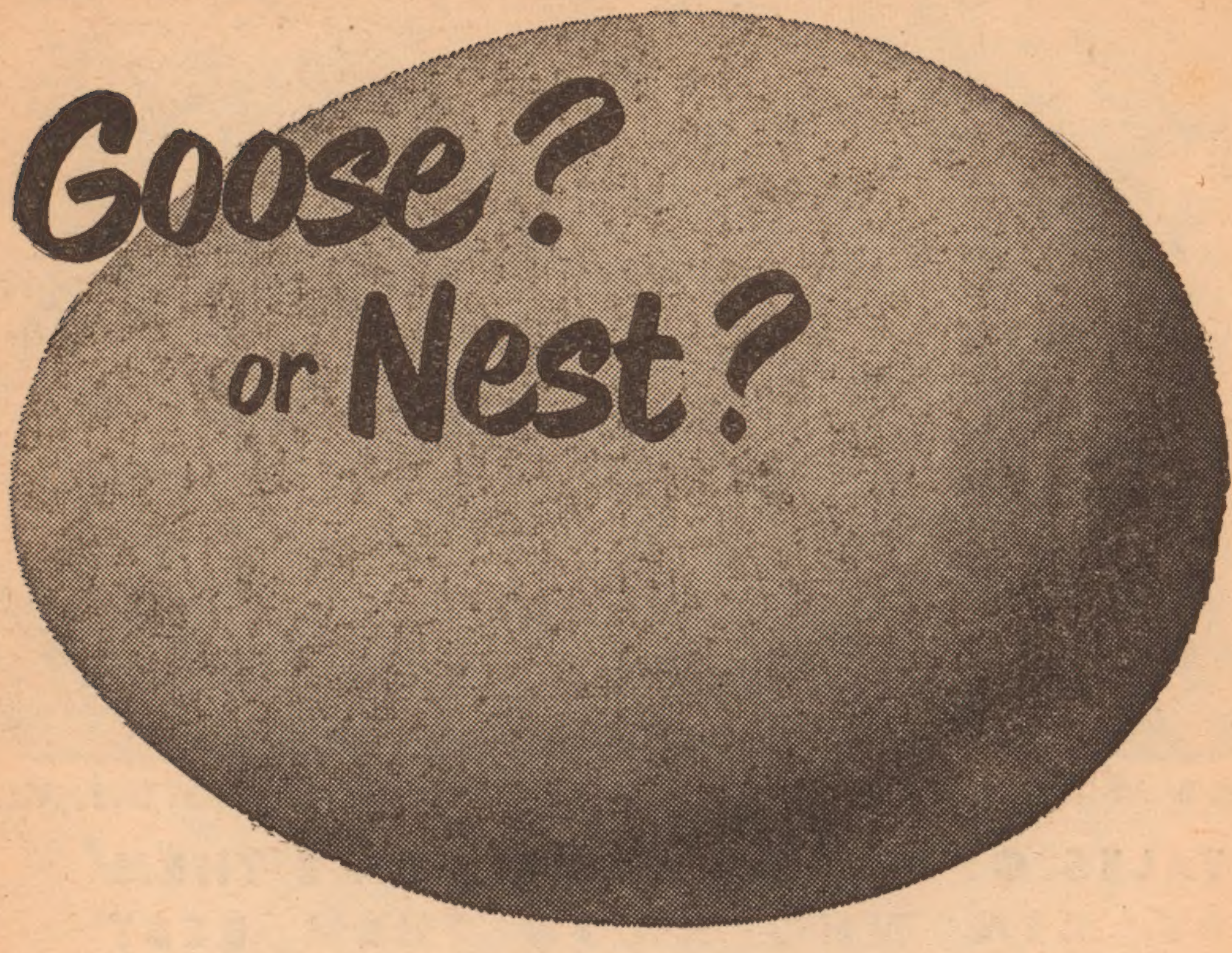
☐ RUSH my copy of BACHELOR'S QUARTERS plus FREE "GREENWICH VILLAGE." On arrival I will deposit with postman only $2.98 plus postage. I may return the books for full refund within 10 days if not completely satisfied.

☐ I enclose $3.00 to save postage and C.O.D. charges. Same free offer and money back guarantee.

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....



WHICH WILL YOU HAVE ?

For some reason, the goose egg stands for zero . . . nothing.

The nest egg, however, stands for a tidy sum of money, set aside for your own or your children's future.

It's hardly necessary to ask you which you'd prefer.

But it *is* necessary to ask *yourself* what you are doing to make sure you *don't* end up with a goose egg instead of a nest egg ten years from now.

The simple, easy, and obvious thing to do is to buy U. S. Savings Bonds.

Buy them regularly, automatically, on a plan that pays for them out of the month-to-month income you make today.

Millions of Americans have adopted this practically painless way to save up a nice nest egg for the needs and wants of the future.

In 10 years they get back $40 for every $30 invested in U. S. Savings Bonds—bonds as safe and solid as the Statue of Liberty.

There's a special Savings Bond Plan for *you.* Ask your employer or banker about it today . . . *and get started now.*

You'll soon realize it's one of the most important and comforting things you ever did!

Automatic saving is sure saving—U.S. Savings Bonds

Contributed by this magazine in co-operation with the Magazine Publishers of America as a public service.

The Amazing ELECTRIC FAUCET HEATER that gives

NOW! HOT WATER from your COLD WATER FAUCET!

-in a Jiffy!

24 HOURS A DAY!

Think of it! THE HOT WATER YOU WANT—*the moment you want it*—from any sink cold-water faucet . . . just by plugging Kem's amazing new Faucet Heater into the nearest electrical outlet. No boiler or tank needed! No fussing with fires. Attached in a jiffy—takes seconds to attach or remove. You merely turn faucet to regulate temperature.

- **For SHAVING early in the morning and late at night**
- **For BABY'S BOTTLES**
- **For use in SICKROOM**
- **For quick LAUNDERING**
- **For use in FACTORY, SHOP AND STORE**
- **For GARAGE, BASEMENT, etc.**
- **For FARMS, BUNGALOWS and COTTAGES that do not have regular hot water supply or where not readily available**
- **When HEATING PLANT BREAKDOWN stops hot water supply**

Worth many times its special low price of only $3.98

You're never without hot water when you own a Kem Electric Faucet Heater. Get one now at the amazingly low cost of only $3.98. Mail coupon TODAY!

KEM COMPANY
18 East 41st Street, Dept. 2M, New York 17, N. Y.
WRITE, COME IN OR CALL LE 2-4181—8th FLOOR

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

- *Operates on AC or DC current*
- *No moving parts to wear away or get out of order*
- *Constructed of handsomely finished aluminum*
- *Weighs less than 1 pound (size 2¾ inches x 3¾ inches)*
- *Underwriter Approved 6-foot extension cord*
- *Costs little to operate a day*

FULLY GUARANTEED!

The Kem Electric Faucet Heater is skillfully made and guaranteed against any and all defects in material and workmanship. With ordinary care it will give years of satisfactory service.

MAIL COUPON TODAY!

KEM COMPANY, 18 East 41st Street, Dept. 2M, New York 17, N. Y.

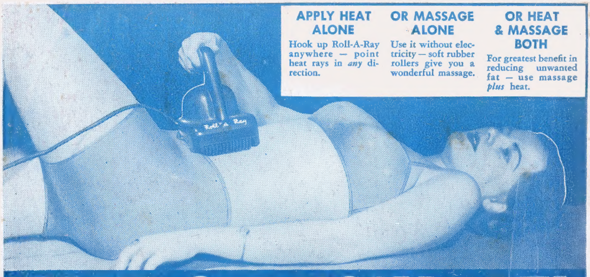
☐ Rush KEM HOT WATER HEATER C.O.D., I'll pay postman $3.98 plus postage.

☐ Enclosed find $3.98. Send POSTPAID.

NAME.....

STREET.....

CITY.....ZONE.....STATE.....
(PLEASE PRINT)



APPLY HEAT ALONE

Hook up Roll-A-Ray anywhere — point heat rays in *any* direction.

OR MASSAGE ALONE

Use it without electricity — soft rubber rollers give you a wonderful massage.

OR HEAT & MASSAGE BOTH

For greatest benefit in reducing unwanted fat — use massage *plus* heat.

TAKE OFF UGLY FAT!

Reduce–Keep Slim–At Home with

Roll-a-Ray

PENETRATING HEAT MASSAGE

Plug in, grasp handle and roll

Underwriters Laboratories Approved

Here is a remarkable new invention which combines two of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—Heat and Massage! With Roll-A-Ray, you can now enjoy the benefits of both *simultaneously*—in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle, and roll the gentle rubber rollers over any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms. The combination of heat and massage aids in softening and breaking down surplus fatty tissue—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more graceful figure!

YOUR OWN PRIVATE MASSEUR—AT HOME

When you use Roll-A-Ray, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also helps relax tired nerves and aching muscles—gives you that "good to be alive" feeling. And it's a wonderful aid for the palliative relief of discomforts due to Rheumatism, Lumbago, Colds, Headaches and other ailments for which penetrating heat or massage, or both, are indicated. Roll-A-Ray is handsomely made of lightweight plastic with two business-like rows of rubber massage rollers and infra-red beam. AC-DC, 110 volts.

TRY THE ROLL-A-RAY 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME

Mail the coupon—without money—for your Roll-A-Ray. On arrival, pay postman only $9.95 plus few cents delivery. Use it for 10 days in your own home. Then, if not delighted, return Roll-A-Ray for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of fat. Mail coupon NOW.

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

HEAD AND CHEST COLDS

Roll-A-Ray's soothing massage and infra-red heat brings transient relief from distress due to colds.

INSOMNIA

Can't sleep? Relax with a Roll-A-Ray. See how soothing its heat rays and gentle massage are.

MUSCULAR ACHES

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts due to rheumatism, lumbago, and other aches and pains.

WOOSTER HOUSE, DEPT. RR63
179 Wooster St., New York 12, N. Y.

Please send me a Roll-A-Ray for 10-day trial period. Upon its arrival I will pay postman only $9.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted, I may return Roll-A-Ray within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

Name..

Address..

City....................Zone..........State..........

☐ SAVE POSTAGE! Check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money-back guarantee applies.